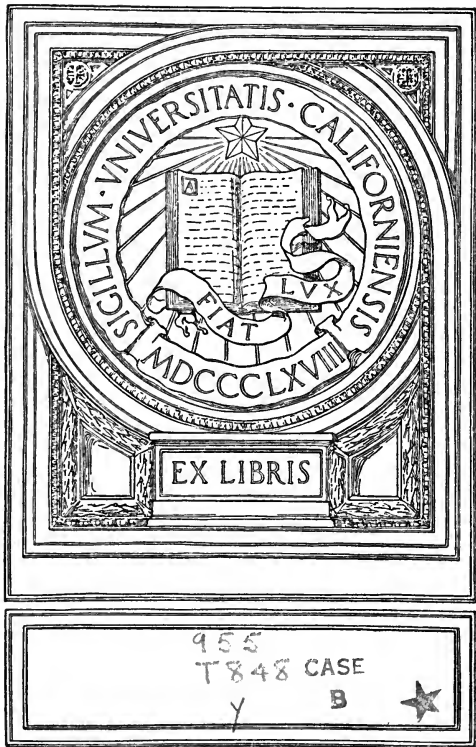


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THE
YOUNG HEIRESS.

A NOVEL.

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BY MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

"FATHER EUSTACE," "THE BARNABYS," &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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THE YOUNG HEIRESS.

CHAPTER I.

THE spectacle that greeted Mr. Bolton on re-entering the parlour was by no means calculated to tranquillize the annoyance and alarm, which the scene in the hall had occasioned him.

The first object on which his eyes rested was the figure of Helen stretched upon the sofa, her lips and cheeks utterly colourless, and her eyes closed ; her uncle was standing at her feet, gazing upon her death-like attitude and complexion, with a look of mingled love and alarm, that it was impossible to witness unmoved : while poor Mrs. Bolton, with all a woman's sympathy, and all a

woman's terror, was unable to obtain even the aid of a glass of water for her, the only exit from the parlour being into the crowded hall, and opening the door which led to it would have been like inviting further outrage and renewed suffering.

"Oh! thank God you are come, Stephen!" she exclaimed. "Are those dreadful people gone? What is it they want? What was it they said about William Rixley?"

"You shall know everything," he replied, "as rapidly as I can make myself understood. But tell me first, what we can do for that poor child. Is she still insensible? I could almost say that I hoped it."

And then, without waiting for an answer, he again left the room, speedily re-entering with water, and followed by a servant with a bottle of vinegar. The application either of one or both these remedies caused Helen to rouse herself, and open her eyes; but they seemed to close themselves again in spite of her efforts. The tears, however, which now began slowly to course each other down her cheeks, showed that she was no longer insensible.

“What is it all about, Stephen?” again exclaimed Mrs. Bolton, with very natural impatience. “Helen has been lying just as you see her, only more death-like still, ever since her uncle brought her in; and he has been too much frightened about her to be able to explain anything to me. Why have all the fishermen rushed into our hall so rudely? And why does this poor child appear to be so dreadfully alarmed at seeing them?”

“She looks better now, Mr. Rixley,” said the master of the house, addressing his guest, while at the same time he took the arm of his wife, and passed it under his own. “I think we may safely leave her with Sally now, and I wish very much to speak to you.”

The three then left the room together, and having entered the little library and closed the door, Mr. Bolton redeemed the promise he had given, by repeating, as succinctly as possible, everything that had passed in the hall.

Mrs. Bolton felt both shocked and terrified. She pressed her hand upon her forehead, but uttered not a word. Mr. Rixley,

too, remained silent for a minute or two after the statement was made, and then said, "This is a very startling communication, Mr. Bolton; but I, as you must be aware, am quite unable to judge of the truth, or even of the probability, of it. Have the kindness to speak to me with entire frankness, my dear sir, and tell me at once whether you think this horrible suspicion has any probability of truth in it."

"With the most perfect sincerity, Mr. Rixley, I answer you that I do not," replied Mr. Bolton. "I think William Rixley infinitely more likely to attempt his own life than that of his father, although that father so very little deserved the name. I have always known William to be warm-tempered and impetuous; but if he had attacked his cruel father at all, it would have been openly and in the face of day—not as a midnight assassin."

"I cannot help thinking," said Mr. Rixley, musingly, "that poor Helen is of a different opinion."

"Good heaven, sir!" cried Mr. Bolton, indignantly, "how is it possible you can

have conceived such an idea? Let me implore you," he added, "to conceal it from her, for most truly do I believe that her love for this brother is such as to make such a suspicion a death-blow to her. She not only loves, but positively reverences him; and I have often heard her say that she thought William was born with a sort of impossibility of doing anything wrong. And upon my honour I have often, when I have heard her say this, been greatly inclined to agree with her. And so I am still, Mr. Rixley."

"Well, sir," returned Mr. Rixley, quietly, "you and Helen must certainly be much better qualified to form an opinion of this unfortunate boy than I can be. In truth, I have never for a moment dreamed of forming any opinion of him at all. All I meant to say was, that there was a sort of agony expressed by the countenance of Helen the moment before she fainted, which I could understand perfectly if anything caused her to believe it possible that this much-loved brother was guilty of the crime laid to his charge; but which remains, in my opinion, perfectly unaccountable if she did not."

“ I am sorry that you should have conceived such an idea,” returned Mr. Bolton, “ because I should greatly wish that you should do justice to the fine qualities of both these young people. However, it is infinitely more important that you should judge Helen rightly than her brother, for with him, poor fellow, it certainly cannot be expected that you should ever have much intercourse ; and as to Helen, who will, I hope, my dear sir, be constantly under your own eye, I can feel no serious misgivings as to your making any mistakes about her. Her nature is as clear and as pure as crystal ; and you will find no difficulty, when you know her better, in understanding everything that is passing in her heart. But all such speculations are equally useless and ill-timed at this moment. I hope, sir, that you agree with me in thinking that our best course must be to let these blundering sailors have their way about the examination ?”

“ Assuredly !” replied Mr. Rixley. “ I much doubt, indeed, whether anything that we could either of us do or say would have influence enough to prevent it. But besides

all other annoyances, my dear Mr. Bolton," added his new acquaintance, "you will have to endure me; for I cannot take this dear child away, nor should I, to say the truth, like to go myself, till this painful question has been set at rest."

His friendly host very earnestly and very sincerely assured him that the painful question, as he most justly called it, would be greatly more painful still, had he not the very important assistance and support of his presence. "But, to tell you the truth," continued Mr. Bolton, "I am very greatly inclined to make light of all the big words we have heard this morning. Not that I at all doubt the sincerity of the zeal and affection expressed for your brother by that stalwart son of Neptune, whose exordium you listened to before you took charge of poor Helen. I am quite sure he was sincere, and himself believed every word he said. But I think you will find that he is mistaken, and that the result of the examination will be that the late Mr. Rixley Beauchamp died a natural death."

"I most earnestly wish it may prove so,

for many reasons," replied Mr. Rixley ; " but I do not agree with you in expecting it."

" May I ask you, my dear sir," returned the curate of Crumpton, in an accent that betokened considerable surprise, " what reason you have for thinking so?"

" Indeed you may, and, indeed, too, I will answer with all sincerity," returned his companion, " though I am quite aware that I can give no very plausible reason for the faith that is in me. I think, however, that the primal cause for my adopting it arose from the effect that man's statement had on poor Helen. My eye was upon her at the moment his words reached her ears ; and I do not think I shall ever forget her look of agony."

" But do you not think that the mere fact of her hearing it stated that her father was murdered may account for her emotion?"

" No, Mr. Bolton, I do not," was the reply. " But add to it," he continued, " the still more dreadful fact that her brother was strongly suspected of being the assassin, and then all the misery expressed in that inno-

cent and most lovely young face is perfectly natural, perfectly intelligible."

"I think the accusation alone is quite sufficient to account for the emotion you witnessed, without supposing that she believed it to be just," replied Mr. Bolton. "Don't you think so, my dear?" he added, turning to his wife.

But his wife appeared not to hear him, for she did not reply. Her face, indeed, was buried in her pocket-handkerchief, and she seemed to be weeping.

Mr. Rixley watched her in silence for a minute or two, and then said, "Will you forgive me, my dear Mrs. Bolton, if I beg you to reply to your husband's question? Not that the opinion of either of us can be of the least real importance in the business, or signify to any of the individuals concerned in it. But you know dear Helen better than I do, and I should much like to hear your interpretation of the agonized emotion she betrayed. Women, you know, are often said to be the keenest observers."

"I certainly will not refuse to answer you, Mr. Rixley," she replied, "though I

would rather not have had the question pressed upon me, for it is a very painful one. Had I, however, nothing but my own acuteness to enlighten me, I certainly should adopt my husband's opinion; but I am sorry to say that I have some reasons for thinking that you, my dear sir, are very likely to be right in your interpretation of Helen's feelings. When Mr. Bolton first brought her home to me after her father's death, she was in a state of such vehement agitation that I really feared she was seized with fever, and was becoming delirious. But not for a moment did she say anything which could lead me to suppose that it was affliction for her father's death which caused this. The only name she uttered was that of her brother, and every hour of his lengthened absence seemed to bring her an additional load of misery. At length I almost scolded her for this violent grief about an absence, which was not likely to endure longer than many of his former rambles had done, and pointed this out to her, and then, after looking piteously in my face for a moment, she threw her arms

round my neck, and with a fresh burst of tears sobbed out, 'Indeed, indeed if that was all I should not be so miserable. It is not so much his being away, though that is bad enough! But it is remembering all that happened before he went!' And then she endeavoured to describe to me the scene of which we had heard before from Mrs. Lambert, and in which the barbarous father of the unhappy boy insulted him in the presence of his sister by the most unfeeling statement that words could convey respecting his birth, and his abject condition. But as she went on with her description of the agony and despair into which this most unexpected discovery had plunged her brother, it was perfectly evident that what rested the most painfully on her mind was the boy's expressions of rage and hatred—for hatred was the word she used—for the treatment he had received. In short," continued Mrs. Bolton, shuddering as she spoke, "the impression she left upon my mind by her description of William's vehement resentment, joined to the agony I saw her suffer, as she dwelt upon the circum-

stance of his having absconded, do lead me very strongly to suspect that your interpretation of her conduct and feelings is less correct, my dear Stephen, than that of Mr. Rixley."

"I had forgotten that Helen had witnessed that terrible discovery scene," said Mr. Bolton with an altered countenance. "God grant that it may be found that there has been no poisoning in the case! Otherwise it is impossible to deny that the coincidence is most unfortunate! Poor Helen! No wonder, if she had this dreadful idea in her head, that his continued absence should be the cause of such severe suffering to her!"

Meanwhile the zeal of the parties, who had undertaken to summon first the doctor and then the coroner, did not relax. The first object was speedily accomplished. But the result of this was too important to be recorded at the end of a chapter.

CHAPTER II.

PAINFUL as the whole of this strange and most startling investigation was to Mrs. Bolton, she never for a moment thought of herself, or regretted that hospitality to the unhappy orphan, which had so completely banished everything like tranquillity from their abode.

The state of poor Helen was indeed such as must have awakened pity in natures far less prone to it than was that of the kind and gentle Mrs. Bolton. But it would have been better for the suffering girl, perhaps, if in addition to gentle kindness, Mrs. Bolton had possessed more firmness of character.

The first symptom which Helen gave of

having perfectly recovered from the faintness which had seized upon her was throwing her arms round the neck of her good hostess, and fervently kissing her. The next was saying in a manner, so imperative, as almost to approach the tone of authority, "Mrs. Bolton, you must not try to prevent my knowing everything that is going on. Every word that John Cummings said in the hall before I fell down the stairs, I *heard* and I *remember*, therefore, you see, it would be as vain as it would be unkind, if you were to attempt keeping me in ignorance. I will not be kept in ignorance, Mrs. Bolton. It would be quite in vain if you were to try to do it. I would find means to leave the house. I would indeed! Nothing shall prevent my hearing of everything that is done and everything that is discovered."

There was something so new and strange in the air of resolute firmness with which these words were spoken by Helen, that Mrs. Bolton's presence of mind was completely overpowered by it.

"You shall! You shall! Dear Helen," she replied, "only you still look so very

pale that just for the present I am quite sure that you ought to think of nothing but keeping yourself quiet."

It was a very scornful sort of smile that curled the lips of Helen as she replied, "It would be quite as easy to make me sit perfectly still with my hands before me, if my dress were in flames, telling me that the fire would burn still more fiercely if I moved. I will not deceive you, Mrs. Bolton, and don't you try to deceive me. It will not answer, for I *will* know everything!"

Poor Helen had very magnificent eyes, a fact of which Mrs. Bolton had never been so fully aware as at that moment, when they were turned upon her with a bright intensity of wilfulness that certainly would have suggested the idea of incipient fever to a more experienced person; but Mrs. Bolton's head was full of her own preconceived, and by no means erroneous opinion, that the imagination of the unhappy girl had already suggested to her all that was most terrible as the possible result of the inquiry which was at that moment going on at the Warren House; and, there-

fore, instead of despatching a messenger who should bring the doctor with all possible haste to bleed her, she yielded to what was more like a command than a request, that a servant should be despatched to the Warren House, and ordered to remain there till the result of the examination was made known, and that the moment he had learnt what it was, he should return and make it known to her.

For this result they had not long to wait. Nothing like precipitation, nothing like rashness, nothing in the least degree resembling indifference, shortened the process ; but the case was too clear to admit of hesitation in deciding that the late George Rixley Beauchamp had died from the effects of poison !

The still more important question, as to how the poison had been administered, was still unsolved, and on this point the eagerness of enquiry was, if possible, still more vehement than concerning the fact itself.

Mrs. Lambert had very earnestly besought permission to be present during the examination, and this was granted. It was not

at that moment deemed necessary to have recourse to dissection ; for on examining the tumbler, which stood on a table close beside his bed, it was found to contain quite enough of the mixture with which it had been filled to show that poison had been mixed with it, and no sooner was this fact distinctly stated by Mr. Foster, than every eye was turned towards Mrs. Lambert, and almost every voice addressed some question to her, all however having the same object, namely to enquire if she thought it possible that her unfortunate master had administered the fatal dose to himself, or, if not, whether her suspicion could rest on any individual as likely to have committed the crime.

She listened to them all, but seemed to wait till they were silent, in order to reply ; and then she said, " I cannot wonder that you should all turn to me to explain this dreadful mystery, and if I cannot throw some light upon it, whom can we hope to find who can ? I have not only lived in his family above a dozen years, but have always been treated, both by him and his children also, more like a friend than a servant. And

yet," she continued, after the pause of a moment or two, during which she seemed meditating on the question that had been asked, "and yet I feel that I am quite as unable to answer you as the greatest stranger here. Some people have said that my master played high when he was in London, and that he sometimes lost large sums of money. Whether this were true or false, I have no means whatever of knowing. I know, indeed, that he sometimes came home from London in a good humour, and sometimes in a very bad one; but as to his being so unhappy as to want to kill himself, I cannot say that any such thought ever entered my head."

"And is there nobody, either young or old, Sarah Lambert, nobody in the whole world that you can think of, who was at all likely to do such a deed?" said John Cummings, looking at her sternly.

She only shook her head in reply, but in a way that evidently showed she thought the question a very idle one.

"There is no use, my good woman, in your looking so very disdainful about it,"

returned Cummings. "There will be other folks, besides you or I either, who will have to examine into this matter; and, may be, it may come into the heads of some of 'em, that the conduct of the dead gentleman's son may be worth inquiring into."

The face of Mrs. Lambert, as these words reached her ears, became for a moment as red as scarlet; her dark eyes seemed to emit an indignant flash, as she fixed them on the speaker; and there was both anger and scorn in the tone of her voice as she replied, "As to the other folks you talk of, I don't know who they may be; but this, I think, I can venture to say, John Cummings, that you won't find another—man, woman, or child—sinful enough to utter such a thought as you have now spoken. But I am ashamed of myself for thinking it worth my while to answer you; for there is, I dare say, a great deal more folly than wickedness in your words, and I don't believe you would find another who would think it worth while to listen to such nonsense."

"For the matter of that, Mrs. Lambert," replied the man, with a sneer, "I don't

fancy that we should be likely to find everybody exactly of your mind respecting that young gentleman. All the world may not think him such a beautiful fellow, and such a spotless angel, as you do. His poor father himself, for one, wasn't a bit blinded by his handsome looks; for I have heard him say, scores of times, that he wished he had never seen the light of day, for that there was no good in him."

"And because the father was an unnatural father, you take it for granted that the son must be an unnatural son, do you?" returned Mrs. Lambert, trembling with passion, and advancing her clenched fist towards him, as if it was her intention to knock him down.

"Come, come, Sarah Lambert," said another of the sailors, "don't you be after putting yourself in a passion. It's all very natural that you should take the part of the pretty boy you have nursed in any quarrel, or strife, that might chance to come between the father and son, but that is no reason why you should threaten to knock down John Cummings in that fashion."

“I ain’t much afraid of Sarah Lambert’s fist,” said Commodore Jack, with a very disdainful smile, “and, to say the truth, I am not much afraid of her, and her anger, in any way ; for I am quite sure that no proper inquiries will be stopped by it, and that is the business that we ought to be thinking of at this present minute. I certainly shan’t take upon me to say that it was his young mis-begot son that murdered the squire ; but for all that, it would be scarcely lawful, and by no means wise, for any of us to forget what we have all heard down the street yonder, concerning the desperate quarrel that there was between them. But for the matter of that, Sarah Lambert, you might all have quarrelled together for everlasting without any of us taking heed of the matter, if it had not been for the fact of his running away. What do you say to that, Mrs. Lambert ?”

“I say,” she replied, making a strong effort to recover her ordinary tranquil aspect, “I say that what you are pleased to call running away was no more than what he had done scores of times before. Nobody

could ever accuse Master William of neglecting his school-work with Mr. Bolton, and he never would have got a long walk at all, poor boy, if he had not done it by what you are pleased to call running away. It was his common practice, Mr. John Cummings, to set off sometimes before it was light in the morning, that he might get a good walk before his eight o'clock breakfast."

"And was it his common practice to get out at the window, letting himself down by means of his sheets? Was that his common practice, Mrs. Lambert?"

Again the blood mounted to the temples of William's friendly advocate, and she was about to make some angry rejoinder, when she checked herself, and said in her usual quiet manner, "We are both of us very wrong, John Cummings, to dispute in this way over the body of our dead master. It will not be our task to say how, or by whose hands, this dreadful event has been brought about. If the doctor is of opinion that our master's death has been caused by poison, the solemn question as to the hand by which it was administered must be inquired into

by those who are appointed by the law of the land for the purpose; and let us hope, for the sake of truth and justice, that those appointed to execute this task will be more cool-headed, and a little less in a passion, than either you or I. However, without any presumptuous wish to decide this question by my own judgment, I must just observe, that at any rate I have a better right to give an opinion about Master William than you can possibly have, for I doubt if you ever exchanged two words with him in the whole course of your life, whereas I have known every thought and feeling of his heart for longer than he can remember what his thoughts and feelings were himself."

"No doubt of it, Sarah Lambert," returned the Commodore, "and it is for that very reason that, if I was upon the jury, I should make a point of not listening to a single word you said. It must be a greenhorn, indeed, who would trust to a mother, or a nurse either, to pass judgment upon their darlings!"

While this angry dialogue was going on

in a distant part of the room, Mr. Bolton and Mr. Foster, who were standing near the bed, conversed together in a whisper upon the steps that must be taken before the blackening corse which lay before them should be consigned to earth.

On this point, however, there was no longer any room for discussion. The indications of poison were too distinct to admit of any doubt, and Mr. Bolton hastened to announce this intelligence to his guest, in order to receive his sanction, without further delay, for summoning the coroner of the district.

But, before he reached his home, the result of Mr. Foster's examination had already been communicated to Helen, and he found his wife deeply lamenting her own want of firmness in not keeping it from her at any risk; for it was only too evident that no irritation produced by opposition to her wishes could have produced so terrible an effect as the compliance with them had done; for the unhappy Helen was already in a paroxysm of raving frenzy, which it was terrible to contemplate or listen to.

CHAPTER III.

It would be difficult to say which of the three friends who watched her, suffered the most. Her uncle, whose warm, though new-born, affection for her seemed that of a fond father, rather than of a more distant relation, stood with his eyes fixed upon her vehemently agitated face till tears bedewed his own. Poor Mrs. Bolton grieved, not only with all the tender feelings of a woman's heart, but she grieved too with all the bitterness of repentance ; for might not all this agony have been spared had Helen been sent away, as she ought to have been, before the violent manner of her father's death had been ascertained ? But probably it was poor Mr. Bolton himself who suffered the most severely, for

Helen was at least unconscious of her own misery ; but he could not deny to himself, whatever he might do to others, that the pupil whom he had loved so affectionately, and of whose character and acquirements he had been so boastfully proud, had made himself liable to the suspicion of having murdered his own father, and that with so many fatal features of probability as to render it almost impossible, even for a friend as partial as himself, to resist their influence.

But not even the unquestionable proof which had reached him of the desperate provocation he had received, nor yet the terribly strong coincidence of his absconding within a few hours probably, or even less, after the deed was done, not even this would have sufficed to conquer his persuasion that the boy was incapable of committing such a crime, had it not been for the desperate agony of his sister.

It was no longer possible to doubt that Helen believed him guilty of it ; every word she uttered in her delirium proved that her mind was too fully possessed with this idea for her to dwell for a moment on any other.

“ Did I not hear him say the words ? ” she

cried. "Did I not hear him say that he could kill him? And now he has done it; now he has brought the dreadful curse upon himself!" Sometimes she shrieked aloud in utter madness, "William! William! William! Where are you? Tell me where you are, only tell me where you are, and I will come to you!"

Meanwhile the necessary steps were taken, and the proper legal routine followed, by which it was speedily declared that "the late George Rixley Beauchamp, Esquire, of Beauchamp Park, in the County of Surrey, had been found in his bed dead, from the effects of poison; the same having been detected in the intestines in amply sufficient quantity to cause death, and a portion thereof having likewise been discovered mixed with the liquid remaining in a glass tumbler placed beside the deceased, and within reach of his hand; but whether wilfully administered by himself, or surreptitiously by another, there was no evidence to shew."

Such was the verdict recorded by the coroner, and such was the conscientious belief of those who delivered the verdict; but

there were others who maintained a different opinion, and who scrupled not to declare their conviction that the drug had been administered by the son of the deceased.

The warfare between John Cummings and Sarah Lambert on this point did not cease, both remaining as firm in their respective opinions as they had shewn themselves during the scene which had taken place in the dead man's room, when the cause of his death had been ascertained by Mr. Foster.

Sarah Lambert had declared, before the people assembled in the room on that occasion had separated, that those who were wicked enough to accuse an innocent boy of such a dreadful crime, would assuredly be made to blush for their folly, and their sin ; for though it was likely enough that the poor lad had been out of the way of hearing what was going on at Crumpton, they would be sure to hear of him before it was long, and then he should come forward, and speak for himself, and put his vile accusers to shame !

Her deep sense of her own degraded position, now known not only to Mr. and Mrs. Bolton, but doubtless to Helen's uncle

also, rendered the idea of presenting herself at the parsonage intolerable to her, and her longing wish to see the suffering sister being thus rendered abortive, she determined, either from a miserable feeling of restlessness, or else from the real hope of finding him, to set off herself in search of the brother.

After quietly sitting in deep meditation for some minutes in the sad, and solitary school-room, she determined to go at once to Falmouth, still thinking it probable that if he had really run off, in the hope of finding some means of existence less distasteful to him than what his father had proposed, he would be more likely to seek it there, than by wandering far and wide among villages where he was utterly unknown.

That she, at least, believed him innocent of the crime that had been laid to his charge was fully proved by the earnest zeal with which she set out to find him; for had it been otherwise, she would most assuredly have done every thing in her power to facilitate his escape instead of impeding it.

To Falmouth therefore she went, and had not been much above half an hour in the

town before she learnt from perfectly good authority that William Rixley had sailed in a little cruising vessel, strongly suspected by some of its captain's most intimate friends, of doing quite as much business in the smuggling line, as in any other.

"And to what port was the vessel bound?" demanded Mrs. Lambert, anxiously.

"Why as to that," replied the old nautical acquaintance to whom she had addressed herself, "we don't none of us make any particular enquiries when the 'Beautiful Polly' sets off upon a cruise, as to what port she intends to make, because it is not always may be, that the captain is quite certain upon that point himself."

Mrs. Lambert paid for this confidential hint by the tolerant smile that was expected from her; and then, somehow or other, made her way back again to the Warren House, weary enough in limb, for she had walked a great part of the way, but apparently more calm in spirit than when she set out.

She must have felt indeed that she had done all she could do to find the unfortunate son of a most guilty father, in the hope that

his own testimony might suffice to clear him of all suspicion of the crime of which he had been accused, and though she had failed in this, she had at least the consolation of feeling that in all human probability he was beyond the reach of any present annoyance from the dreadful suspicion that attached to him.

There was now but one thing left in the place where she had passed the last twelve years of her life to which her affections clung; the thought of Helen being taken away to the distant spot which was to be her future home without her once more seeing her was dreadful, and yet there were moments when the idea that this dearly loved child would enter upon life as the wealthy heiress of her false, her cruel, her unnatural father, produced a degree of happiness at her heart's core which seemed to console her for every thing she had suffered, or could suffer.

Any one who had watched the bright flashing of her beautiful and triumphant eye during these moments, would have fancied they were contemplating a proud woman who had accomplished the first and dearest object of her life.

But might she not see her once? Doubtless her own disgraceful story was already known to the uncle whose task it would be to watch henceforward over the beautiful and wealthy orphan who had no other protector left; and ought not the very first act of his protecting care be to remove her for ever from the degradation of associating with her father's mistress?

“ Shall I ask and be refused? Or shall I let her go without making any effort to press her once more to my heart?” Such were the questionings in which she passed a great portion of the night that followed her return from Falmouth; but the news which greeted her the next morning was of a nature to make her forget all other misery, for she was told that Helen was in a phrensy fever, and not expected to survive the day.

There was no room for any further doubt as to what she should do. Mrs. Lambert, pale and haggard, rushed to the parsonage, entered it by the door which led to the kitchen, and spared the guardian friends of poor Helen the difficult task of deciding whether she should be admitted, or not, by

making her way to the room in which she had already seen her, without speaking a word to any one.

On first entering the room it appeared to her to be perfectly dark, and she only guessed she had not blundered by hearing a low moaning sound that proceeded from the bed. But Almeria Lambert was not a person to endure suspense of any kind. She approached the glimmering light which proceeded from the nearly closed window shutters, and threw them open.

A terrible foreboding made her feel that she was about to behold a dreadful spectacle; she thought that she might see her darling lying in the pangs of death before her; but even this could scarcely have been felt as more piteously sad than the reality that met her eye.

It was Helen! It *must* be Helen, for it could be no one else, who lay stretched before her; but it is difficult to do justice by description to the change between what she was, and what she had been.

She was lying on her back, with a wet

napkin bound round her forehead, but neither napkin, nor pillow, were more completely colourless than her face. She had been bled so copiously that she had no longer strength to rave with the vehemence which had preceded her present state, but there was no trace of reason in the quick movement of her vacant eye, nor in the ceaseless moanings which she uttered, sometimes articulately, and sometimes not. Her dark brown hair lay scattered round her in dishevelled curls that hung down over the bed-clothes to the very tips of her pale fingers, round which she incessantly kept twisting it. The tone of her voice was completely altered, and had a piteous trembling in it which gave the idea of excessive weakness.

Mrs. Lambert stood for a moment at the bottom of the bed as if transfixed, and then bending over her, she whispered, in a voice almost as tremulous as her own, "And is this all that is left of my child? Is this my beauteous Helen? Is this my peerless heiress?" And then covering her face with her hands, she fell on her knees and rather

groaned, than distinctly uttered the words, "My God! I have sinned, and I am punished!"

There was by the side of the bed which was furthest from the door of entrance, a silent, motionless figure, which, in the vehement agitation of Mrs. Lambert, had been perfectly invisible, or, at any rate, perfectly unnoticed by her. It was the quiet, suffering, sympathising Mrs. Bolton, who, fully persuaded that poor Helen was dying, had herself undertaken to watch beside her, in preference to permitting any servant to listen to her ravings, in which she uniformly declared her conviction that her father had died by the hand of her brother.

Whether the fact were so, or not, there was as yet no certain evidence to show; and Mrs. Bolton humanely, and wisely, determined that the unfortunate young man should not be robbed of the benefit of this doubt by the delirious accusations of his wretched sister.

Mrs. Bolton now came forward, and, gently approaching the unhappy intruder, begged her, in a whisper, to rise, and compose her-

self. "Though we have little or no hope of saving her," she said, "we are still enjoined by Mr. Foster to keep her perfectly quiet, that being, he assures us, the only possible chance we can give her in aid of her youth, and fine constitution."

Mrs. Lambert said nothing in reply, but she rose from her knees, and fixing her eyes upon Helen, stood silently and motionless before her.

Whether it were from seeing this figure suddenly placed before her, or from being roused by the strong light, which the opening of the shutters had let in upon the room, it would be impossible to say; but certain it is, that the eyes of Helen, now stedfastly fixed upon Mrs. Lambert, had more appearance of consciousness of what was before them than had been perceptible since her delirium began.

Yet still it was evident that she by no means very clearly understood who it was who was looking at her so earnestly; but, by degrees, the vacant expression of her countenance seemed to give way before a touch of memory, for the unmeaning look of

idiot indifference gradually became changed into a contracted brow, and an expression of great suffering. And presently she spoke, but it was in so weak a whisper, that it required an eagerly attentive ear to understand what she said.

“ He told me so himself, Sarah Lambert, he did ! he did ! ” were the first words distinctly audible, and Mrs. Lambert, perceiving she was recognised, changed her position, and placing herself at the bedside, bent down and took her hand.

But though the action caused poor Helen to raise her eyes to the face which hung over her, their vacant stare showed but too plainly that the awakened intelligence, which had seemed to beam from them for a moment, had passed away.

“ I believe it is better not to speak to her,” whispered Mrs. Bolton ; to which the nurse of many years made no other reply, than again placing herself on her knees, and, though still retaining the hand she had taken, remaining as motionless as a statue.

But not so the poor patient. She presently gave symptoms of being restless, and uneasy,

still remaining stretched upon her back, but turning her head from side to side upon the pillow with a movement every moment increasing in rapidity. "We have been wrong to disturb her," again whispered Mrs. Bolton, "it is just what the doctor told us to avoid! Let me beg of you to go down stairs, Mrs. Lambert! I promise you faithfully, that you shall be sent to, if there is the least change."

Mrs. Lambert felt that she dared not disobey, and gently disengaging her hand from the burning fingers which were now grasping it tightly, she rose and noiselessly approached the door. But this sufficed again to awaken the attention of the poor sufferer, and with a sudden effort she raised herself in the bed, and, stretching out her arms towards her nurse, exclaimed distinctly, "That is Sarah Lambert! and she is going away from me again! Cruel, cruel, Sarah! I should not have been ill, and obliged to lie here both night and day if you had stayed with me! You ought to have stayed with me, Sarah Lambert! You know that you ought not to have gone away from me!"

This plaintive and almost sobbing remonstrance immediately arrested Mrs. Lambert's steps, but it was to Mrs. Bolton that she addressed herself, and not to Helen.

"She has recovered her senses," she said, in a low whisper. "You cannot wish, madam, that I should leave her now?"

"I know not what to think!" replied poor Mrs. Bolton. "Her seeing and knowing you may make her worse than ever!"

"Surely, Mrs. Bolton, when she opposes my going, you would not insist upon it?"

"I know not what to do!" reiterated the poor lady, "his last words were, 'let her be kept perfectly quiet.'"

"Let Mr. Foster be instantly sent for," returned Mrs. Lambert, almost in a voice of authority. "Trust me she will not be the less quiet because I am near her. Send at once for Mr. Foster, and let us have the assistance of his judgment. I will stay with her the while, as she wishes me to do, but I will not converse with her."

And so saying, Mrs. Lambert, without waiting for any reply, placed a chair close beside the bed, and seated herself in it.

While these few words were passing between her ill-matched attendants, the eyes of Helen were again closed, and she remained for a moment perfectly still, upon observing which, Mrs. Bolton said, "Perhaps if we leave her quite to herself she will go to sleep."

It was immediately evident that these words were heard, and understood by Helen, for her eyes were again opened, and, after looking about her vaguely for a moment, she again fixed them on Mrs. Lambert, and made an effort to reach her with her hand; nor was the effort vain. The watchful nurse gently took possession of that hand, and having given it a gentle pressure, almost fancied that she felt a gentle pressure in return.

Mrs. Bolton had already left the room to dispatch a messenger for the doctor, whose advice she felt was more than ever needed; and then, Helen, after giving one lingering languid glance at the face of her nurse, closed her eyes, and presently gave evidence by her breathing, that she really had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

HELEN RIXLEY, or, begging the heiress's pardon, Helen Beauchamp, like many another young creature, who has terrified the hearts that cling to them by appearing at the point of death, rallied at the very moment when it appeared most certain that all hope was gone, and very speedily made it evident that whatever other perils might threaten, her death was not just at present of the number.

Mr. Foster knew a great deal too well what he was about not to take advantage of Mrs. Lambert's very evident influence over his patient; but Mr. Bolton, who very plainly perceived that her attendance upon Helen was extremely distasteful to her uncle, had thought it right to hint this to Mr. Foster; but his only reply was, "I should have given

up the case, Mr. Bolton, had you said this two days ago. The cause of Miss Beauchamp's malady was mental; and had not this favourite nurse come forward to help me, I sincerely believe we should have lost her."

"It is most unfortunate," returned Mr. Bolton, "that such powerful reasons should exist to render her attendance objectionable!"

"Certainly it is unfortunate," replied the doctor; "and I have been for years pretty nearly as well aware of this as I am at present. Had the same suspicion been awakened in your mind, Mr. Bolton," he continued, "I imagine that it would have been your duty to interfere, with counsel at least, though you might not have had authority, in order to get rid of her; but my vocation was different. Moreover, I had abundant opportunity for studying the real state of affairs at the Warren House; and the result of this was, my feeling morally certain that, though I might have power to do mischief, I had none to do good, as far at least as getting rid of this decidedly objectionable attendant upon the young lady. But if I

thought it right to abstain from any such attempt then, of course I must think a contrary line of conduct infinitely more injudicious now ; for, in the first place, Helen is happily now so well protected as to satisfy her most anxious friends as to her safety ; and, in the next, the question has been, in my opinion, one of life or death ; so that I only conceived myself free to act in my medical capacity."

"Assuredly, Mr. Foster," replied the curate of Crumpton ; "and I should have blamed you greatly had you acted otherwise. But now that, thank God, this desperate state of things no longer continues, we may certainly, without scruple, comply with the wish of her uncle, that the attendance of Mrs. Lambert should be dispensed with."

"Well, sir," rejoined Mr. Foster, "I thank God, as you do, that the question is no longer a medical one ; and, therefore, of course, I have nothing to do with it."

It was, in short, very evident that the office of dismissing Mrs. Lambert was one which the village doctor did not wish to take upon himself ; neither did it appear that the

clergyman of the parish was at all inclined to perform it personally, for he asked his gentle little wife if she did not think it would be more suitable and less offensive for her to hint that their small house, being rather more than full, her departure would be convenient? But his gentle little wife demurred; she did not like the commission; but she suggested that Mr. Rixley might make it known that he wished to hasten his departure; and she promised that if he did this, she would undertake to tell Mrs. Lambert that they all thought her separation from Helen ought not to be put off till the very last moment, lest the agitation arising from it might render her less able to undertake the journey.

This device answered completely; Mrs. Lambert adopted the proposal quite as eagerly as it was made. It was very evident that she too dreaded the moment, and that too for herself as well as for Helen, for her lip trembled as she talked of it.

“ Yes!” she said, “ it is a trial—a trial for us both! For me, it matters not. But for her, it must be made as easy as possible.

She shall not know that she is seeing me for the last time."

"Indeed, Mrs. Lambert, if you can manage that," replied Mrs. Bolton, "it will be saving her from great suffering. I never saw a young person so strongly attached to a nurse, as she is to you."

"Yes. There has been for a good many years a strong attachment between us," returned the other, with dry and forced composure. "It is not probable," she added, "that any one should even guess how much I have loved her; and as to their knowing it, that is a good deal less likely still."

She sat silent for a few minutes, covering her face with both her hands; and when she looked up again, the whole expression of her features was changed. It was almost impossible that any face could display less of tenderness, or speak more intelligibly of unconquerable firmness of purpose, than hers did at that moment.

Had she objected to parting with Helen, instead of so readily agreeing to it, Mrs. Bolton could not have looked at her at that moment without alarm, for the least observant

eye could not fail in perceiving that *to will* and *to do* were not in her case very likely to be separated.

This conversation took place in the room in which Helen slept; and the moment had been selected by Mrs. Bolton as being safe from any interruption from her, because she had left it to accept her uncle's invitation to take a short airing upon the lawn, supported by his arm. She had done this twice before, and had seemed the better for it.

And now Mrs. Bolton rose, very greatly comforted at having performed her task so effectually.

"We must not let her walk too long," said she, looking out of the window.

"Is she there?" said the discarded nurse, in a voice so strange, that it made Mrs. Bolton start, as if she had suddenly heard that of an interloper, whom she did not know.

"Yes," replied she, "Helen is walking on the lawn. Her uncle is very kind and thoughtful; but women make the best nurses, Mrs. Lambert." And with these words she left the room.

For half a moment the suffering being she

left in it remained stationary between the door and the window ; but she trembled, as she stood, from head to foot—and then, with what seemed a desperate effort, she approached that open window, and, concealing herself behind its curtain, looked out upon the lawn.

Mrs. Bolton had reported truly. Helen was there, her arm resting upon that of her uncle, with the air of one who wanted support ; but she was looking up at him affectionately, and there was a smile upon her countenance.

“ Helen ! my beautiful Helen ! my lovely, gifted, high-born, wealthy heiress ! you shall be the honoured bride of the rich and the noble ! No tyrant voice, no tyrant glance, shall ever crush thee more ! ”

As she murmured these words she clasped her hands together, letting the curtain she had held before her fall aside. The moving drapery caught the eye of Helen, and she looked up, smiled, and nodded affectionately, and then passed on. “ It is over ! ” whispered Almeria Lambert to her heart. “ The rest will be very easy ! ”

CHAPTER V.

ON re-entering the house Helen declared that her walk had done her much good, that she felt a great deal better, and that she should like very much to take her tea in the parlour—an announcement which was received with great satisfaction by both host and hostess, who met her at the door. There was a general protest, however, against her mounting to her room to deposit her bonnet and shawl; and she, therefore, passed on into the parlour, and was carefully placed on the sofa by her watchful friends. It was declared on all sides, however, that, notwithstanding her evident improvement, she must retire early to rest; to which she dutifully agreed, though declaring at the same time that she really felt “almost quite well again.”

When the servant removed the tea-tray, she whispered a few words in the ear of her mistress, who immediately got up, and followed her out of the room. In the hall, she found Mrs. Lambert, in her bonnet and shawl, waiting for her.

“Are you going out, Mrs. Lambert?” said she; “Miss Helen will be going to bed immediately.”

“May I speak to you for one moment in the library, madam?” returned the nurse.

Mrs. Bolton, remembering what had passed between them a few hours before, immediately guessed her purpose; and though half-frightened by its suddenness, and by her fears as to its effect upon Helen, she still experienced a feeling of relief, from her conviction that the task she had so much dreaded was very nearly accomplished. Her only reply to the request of Mrs. Lambert was opening the door of the library, and entering the room.

Mrs. Lambert followed her, and closed the door. “I have thought it best, madam,” she said, “to act at once upon your suggestion. The sooner Miss Beauchamp

leaves this place, the better. She has a pang to suffer, but it must be borne; and the sooner it comes, the sooner it will be over. I have taken the liberty of using the writing materials which I found in Miss Beauchamp's room; and after you left me there, I wrote this letter to her. You are perfectly at liberty to read it, madam, and to show it to her uncle, and to Mr. Bolton, before it is delivered to her. I should recommend her not receiving it till to-morrow morning; but when she goes to bed, and expresses surprise, perhaps, at not finding me in her room to undress her, I think it will be best to tell her that I had received a message from a person I wanted to see on business, and that I should probably be detained too late to return to the parsonage to night. This will send her to bed without any suspicion that she has seen me for the last time; and the longer the possibility of our meeting again is permitted to remain with her, the better; at least, till her health and strength are completely restored.—And in my judgment," added the unhappy woman, with a faltering accent, strangely un-

like her usual manner of speaking, "in my judgment, it would be much better for her if she could be permitted to live and die without knowing that she had ever suffered the degradation of loving, and being loved by one unworthy to approach her."

"Your judgment respecting everything connected with Helen ought to be listened to with great attention," replied Mrs. Bolton, with all the quick, kind sympathy of a woman's heart; nor ought it to be recorded against the spotless wife and happy mother, as a sin, though she laid her hand with a friendly pressure on the arm of the trembling woman before her as she said it.

Had there been less of desperate sternness in the condition into which Mrs. Lambert had screwed her own spirit, she might have been tempted to kneel before the gentle being, who so evidently pitied sufferings which she never had, nor ever could feel; but, as it was, she only turned her head aside, and remained silent for a moment, and then said, "Here is the letter, madam. If you think it will assist the purpose which her friends have in view, you will give it to

her: if not, destroy it, if you please, and say to her on the subject of my disappearance whatever may appear most judicious to yourself, and to those who act with you."

Having said this, she bowed her head, and left the room with a rapid step, as if to escape farther parley.

Mrs. Bolton's first act of obedience to her wishes, was putting the unread letter in her pocket, and returning with an air of so much composure to the parlour, that Helen, who was listening smilingly to her uncle's description of what he called his rather ugly daughter and his very ill-behaved son, did not even perceive her entrance.

But she was not permitted to amuse herself in this manner long, before it was voted, in a committee of the whole tea-table, that it was high time for her to go to bed. Her very docile compliance was a proof, perhaps, that she thought so too; and, leaning on the arm of her uncle, preceded by a candle in the hand of her kind hostess, she mounted the stairs to her room.

"Where is Sarah Lambert?" were the first words she uttered on entering it.

"We must do without her to-night, my dear Helen," replied Mrs. Bolton, "for she has been sent for from the Warren House by some person who wished to speak to her on business. We shall be able to do without her; shall we not, dearest?"

"Indeed, my dear Mrs. Bolton," replied Helen, "everybody in your house is so very kind to me, that I must be a very whimsical girl if I fancied that I wanted anybody out of it." And in truth, all the little thoughtful attentions which she had of late received from her faithful nurse were now very ably performed by good Mrs. Bolton herself, and the 'Good nights!' exchanged between them at parting were equally cordial on both sides.

This more than hospitable attention was repeated on the following morning, and then poor Helen, despite a strong wish not to betray any such feeling, certainly did look as if she wondered why Sarah Lambert did not present herself.

"I am sure you are wondering, Helen, that your nurse is not come back again to look after you; but I suspect that something

unexpected has happened, which has detained her, for she has written to you instead of coming."

Helen took the letter from the hand of Mrs. Bolton, but looked more surprised than alarmed at receiving it.

"Will you read it now, dear, or after breakfast?" said Mrs. Bolton. "The two gentlemen are waiting for us at the breakfast-table, but it will not hurt them to wait a little longer, if you wish to read your letter before you go down."

"Let me follow you, dearest Mrs. Bolton; may I?" returned Helen. "Perhaps she may have heard something about William."

Though this explanation for her wishing to read the letter in private was neither very explicit nor very satisfactory, it was listened to as if it were both, and Mrs. Bolton left her.

Scarcely had she closed the door behind her, before the letter was opened. It was as follows:—

"I hope, my dearest child, that your judgment will accord with mine in approving

what I am about to do. We need not tell each other, Helen, that William is the great object that occupies our thoughts, and, therefore, you will not think any apology necessary for my running away from you—(even at the moment previous to your departure)—when I tell you that I *think* I may be able to trace him, if I set about the task in person. But, if I decide on doing this, I have not a moment to lose. It is not very likely that I should be able to give you constant, or even frequent information of my expedition, for I do not intend to confine my search to one country only; but, whenever it is possible for me to write to you, I will do so; and, should a longer interval occur than such an enterprise may reasonably account for, why then, my dearest child, you may mourn for your faithful nurse as for one no longer to be counted among the living. But let us hope that I may still be useful to you, and that, through my means, the brother so justly dear to you may be induced to return to the land of his birth, where I know, as well as you do, my dear child, that he will never want a friend

as long as you remain alive in it. And now, dearest Helen, I must say farewell. I have undertaken a difficult enterprise, but my courage is strengthened by my conviction that you will be often with me in spirit, and that, whether I live or die, you will still continue to love your affectionate and faithful nurse,

“SARAH LAMBERT.”

This letter, temperately and carefully as it was written, was not read by Helen without strong emotion—much stronger, certainly, than was desirable for an invalid, whose nerves had been already so severely shaken; but, nevertheless, the three friends to whom she communicated its contents, congratulated themselves, and each other, that the strangely-situated young creature, for whom they were so deeply interested, had passed so well through one of the difficult and very trying moments from which all their tender care could not entirely protect her; nor could they, either of them, refuse to acknowledge a sentiment in which a strange mixture of gratitude, and even of

esteem, was mixed with the feeling of earnest reprobation which led them to hope that they might never hear of Sarah Lambert again.

As to Helen herself, she suffered infinitely less than she would have done, had not an almost superstitious feeling of confidence in the wisdom and perseverance of her nurse led her to anticipate the happiest results from the efforts she was about to make for the recovery of William.

CHAPTER VI.

How far this statement of Mrs. Lambert's intentions contained the record of her real projects, or how far it might have been made for the purpose of satisfactorily accounting to Helen for her absence, may be seen hereafter; at any rate it had the happiest effect on the spirits of the invalid, for not only did it completely tranquillize her mind under the heavy affliction of parting with her nurse, but it created more cheering hopes respecting her brother than she had felt since she had first heard of his absence.

Her confidence in the judgment and the firm affection of Sarah Lambert, was unbounded; and she could scarcely be said to

feel any doubt either as to her success in finding him, or in her power of assisting him afterwards. "Her first object will be to bring us together again," thought Helen. "But yet—if it would be best not—if it would be dangerous for my poor William to come to me, why then she will watch over him till the danger is over."

This was her next thought; and dreadful as was the pain occasioned by the dark suspicion which led to this after thought, it was immeasurably softened by the idea that he would soon have Sarah with him. So healing, in truth, was this hope, that though it could not chase away the feeling that the frightful accusation uttered by Cummings *might* be true, it gave birth to a whole host of reasons for believing that it was false; and one of the brightest blessings of Helen's age is the strong propensity to believe pretty nearly everything that we wish should be true.

In this state of things the departure of Helen with her uncle was robbed of almost all the melancholy features which must have attended it, had no such hope as that

suggested by the letter of Mrs. Lambert reached her. As it was, there was, despite all the painful and agitating circumstances through which she had recently passed, a considerable mixture of that delightful buoyancy, made up of present novelty and future hope, which in early youth gives brightness to almost everything we look upon.

The result of this upon her companion was most happy also, for more than once it had happened to him, when gazing with newly-awakened affection upon her lovely face, to feel a painful doubt as to the probability of her feeling unhappy, and ill at ease, from being so suddenly removed from all that was familiar and dear to her, and placed amidst a family of strangers.

But there was nothing now in the manner of Helen to justify such misgivings. She had been ill, and now she felt well again; she had been desperately terrified, and now her terrors were soothed; her life had hitherto been as destitute of anything like real freedom as that of a squirrel, whose abounding activity can take it no inch

beyond the unvaried routine of its unmeaning scamper ; and now every glance showed her something new, and every word spoken by her kind companion made her look forward to future scenes more new and more interesting still.

In short, instead of being fatigued or in any way injured by her rapid journey to London, she was very greatly the better for it, and when she entered the little drawing-room of her uncle in Davies Street, the family group she found there were almost startled at seeing the tall and lovely girl who entered among them, instead of the sickly, melancholy-looking child they expected.

This family group consisted of the still lovely Mrs. Rixley, her son Henry, and her daughter Anne.

There were certainly many circumstances connected with this newly-found relative, which tended to give a feeling of restraint and awkwardness to their meeting. In the first place she was the child of a near relative who had never been known to the two younger Rixleys, and scarcely to their

mother either, but as a declared and inveterate enemy. In the next, the fact was patent among them that had this stranger young lady been out of the way, the noble property, of which she, poor child, had never heard till within the last miserable few weeks, but of which they had certainly been accustomed to hear a good deal, would have been their own.

It cannot be denied that these facts, well established, and clearly remembered, were not calculated to make them feel quite as affectionate, as they were curious concerning her. But a lovely young face is decidedly a very fascinating object. There is no denying it, and in this case, as in a million more upon record, all foregone conclusions were forgotten as they looked at her; and a very few seconds sufficed to make her reception all that her kind uncle wished it to be.

As to the impressions produced on Helen herself, they were quite as favourable towards the wished-for result of mutually kind feeling as those of her newly-found relatives; nay, perhaps, young as she was, there was more of wisdom as to the source of their formation

than could be easily pointed out in those she had inspired. For it was not beauty that had captivated her. Not indeed that her cousin Anne at all deserved the epithet of 'ugly,' which had been bestowed on her by her father.

Anne Rixley was not ugly, but neither was she beautiful; nor was her brother handsome. Their mother, indeed, might still fairly be described as both, or either; but the beauty of forty-five is not so lovely in the eyes of fourteen, as it may appear to those of riper judgment.

No! It was not the beauty of her kinsfolk which had captivated Helen; but nevertheless she was captivated.

In the countenance of Mrs. Rixley there was as charming a mixture of goodness, and intelligence, as could well be expressed by human features; nobody who had eyes capable of detecting either, could feel a doubt upon the subject. In the young, fresh, guileless physiognomy of Anne might be read with equal facility all that makes youth and innocence most loveable, while there was something in the fine broad fore-

head that gave goodly promise of what was ripening within. And as to Henry, although a grave old Don might have been likely to detect rather a superabundant quantity of latent sauciness, Helen only saw a look of animation and light-heartedness that seemed to promise very pleasant companionship. In short, within a very few minutes after these very near relations, but very perfect strangers, had been introduced to each other, they were in a fair way of becoming excellent friends.

* * * *

There was of course a great deal of business to be got through before Helen's present manner of life could be decided on; but though many things were to be attended to, there was no difficulty in the arrangement of any of them, nor is it necessary to rehearse the details of these arrangements. Mr. Rixley was appointed personal guardian to the young heiress, and as his small London house could not accommodate her, and the male and female servant appointed to attend her, it was finally settled that her uncle should give up his London curacy,

and, very greatly to the delight of the country-bred Helen, that the whole family should take up their residence at Beauchamp Park. The chief, perhaps the only objection to this arrangement arose from the difficulty of obtaining *finishing* masters for the heiress at the distance of forty miles from London.

If the conversation by which this knotty point was finally settled be given to the reader, it may enlighten him a little as to the terms on which Helen and her newly-found family lived together. This conversation took place the morning after she had been taken to make her first visit to the noble mansion which was to be her future home.

"I am very glad, dear Helen," said her uncle kindly, "that the house and grounds of Beauchamp Park please you so greatly. I should have been sadly disappointed, if you had not liked the place."

"Like it, uncle Rixley!" returned Helen, throwing up both hands and eyes in astonishment at his phrase. "Did you really think it possible in your heart that I should *not* like it?"

“Possible? Yes certainly, Helen, I thought it was possible. You have seemed to be so much amused by all the fine sights we have been showing you in London, that I should have been but little surprised to hear you say that you should not like living at Beauchamp Park at all,” replied her uncle.

“But I don’t want to live in the sight-seeing places, uncle Rixley,” returned Helen, laughing, “Should you really think it a good plan for us all to take a house next door to the Museum, so that we might conveniently run in and out there three or four times a day?”

“Not exactly that, Helen,” he replied with great good humour, “but there is a long interval between living next door to one favourite exhibition, and being at forty miles distance from all. However, there may be greater objections than that. How are we to get proper finishing masters for you, young lady?”

“Oh uncle! uncle! don’t finish me!” she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and looking beseechingly in his face. “I do assure

you beforehand, that it would never answer ! I know that I am not a sort of person that can ever be finished. I have read a great deal about a finished education, and I am quite certain that it would not do for me."

" But you draw so well, Helen, and are so very fond of it," said her aunt, " that I should have thought you would have liked nothing so well as having a good master."

" Perhaps Helen thinks that she has been too well taught already to require any new master," said Henry, smiling.

" I do not know whether you say that as a joke, cousin Henry," she replied, " but if you say it in earnest, I can tell you that you are quite right. If I were to live a thousand years I should never like to remember that I ever had drawing lessons from anybody, except my mamma. I know that I was not very old when she died, very little more than twelve, but that does not signify. I am quite certain that nobody can ever teach me as well as she taught me. You look as if you were ready to laugh again, cousin Henry, and I dare say you think me a very conceited girl for boasting so much about

my mother. But my mamma really was quite out of the common way as to the power of teaching. It was not only drawing, but music, and French, and Italian, and everything. My mamma was brought up as a governess, or a teacher at a school, whichever came in her way first. She has told me all about it over and over again. Dear, dear mamma! She thought it might be useful to me in case I might ever be obliged to maintain myself in the same way! I don't believe she ever heard of Beauchamp Park in her life, and sure I am that she never thought it would belong to me. But as things have turned out, I really don't think there is any good reason for my trying to make myself into a little girl again. I don't think I should learn anything but naughtiness. I should hate my masters, and try, very likely, to make Henry laugh at them, instead of laughing at me, for you may be very sure I should not think them so clever as my mamma."

Mr. Rixley very patiently, and very willingly, let her run on thus, for he wished to know her thoroughly before he decided the

important question, whether it would be best to use the authority that was vested in him in order that the next year or two might be so employed as to supply the educational deficiencies of those which had intervened since her mother's death, or to yield to her wishes, which it was easy to see would be somewhat peremptorily pronounced, and suffer her to be happy her own way.

He was determined, however, that, if possible, he would decide on nothing hastily, for he felt that the duty he had to discharge was an important one.

After the silence of a moment he said, "How then, my dear Helen, would you propose, yourself, to occupy the time that has yet to elapse before you can take your place in society as a woman?"

Helen's bright eye was raised to his face with sudden quickness, and she replied, "I would read, read, read!"

"Bravo, Helen!" exclaimed her cousin Henry, clapping his hands, "I don't think she is quite a fool, after all. I have a great notion myself that if the younger part of the divine sex were, either from whim, or

wisdom, to read a little more, and study accomplishments a little less, it might be better for all parties concerned."

"If you have such a notion, cousin Henry," she replied, with a good deal of comic solemnity, "I presume that my uncle will feel no further doubt upon the subject. The question is settled; is it not? dear uncle! dear aunt! say that the question is settled, and that we shall all go and live together at Beauchamp Park." The pair she addressed looked at her, and looked at each other in a way that certainly did not seem to threaten any very vehement opposition to her wishes; but as the answer was delayed, probably because each was waiting for the other to speak first, Helen rose from her chair, and bounding across the room to her uncle, put her arms around his neck, and whispered in his ear, "Was not my grand-mamma Rixley, whose maiden name was Beauchamp, born and bred there?"

"She has gained her cause, ladies and gentlemen," said her uncle, returning her caress. "You may all pack up your properties. Beauchamp Park must be our

home till this self-willed young lady bestows it with her own fair hand upon a master."

"Thank you! oh, thank you! thank you!" cried the delighted girl, "Shall we not, all of us, feel more happy in that beautiful large place, than jammed into this narrow little street? You and I, Anne, will have one whole garden entirely to ourselves. Won't we have flowers by the bushel?"

Upon being thus appealed to, Anne, who had sat profoundly silent, while profoundly listening, stood up to meet her cousin, who she saw was approaching her, and receiving on her fair rosy cheek the cordial kiss that was offered her, exclaimed in accents of the most cordial delight, "Oh, Helen, dear! you have made me so very happy! To live at Beauchamp Park! To live there for years, perhaps! I feel as if I were dreaming, and that it was all too wild and delightful to be true."

"Charming," cried Helen, gaily repeating her kiss. "But what says my dear gentle aunt to it?" she added, playfully approaching Mrs. Rixley, with her hands joined, beseechingly.

"I must answer like my happy-looking

girl here, I think," returned her aunt. "The scheme would appear to me perfect, were it not a little too splendid to seem true."

"Ay, there's the rub," said Mr. Rixley, gently shaking his head. "The allowance made for you by the Court of Chancery, Helen, is two thousand a year, and a very noble allowance it is. But I greatly doubt if it will be found sufficient to support such an establishment as would be suitable for Beauchamp Park."

"Then let us all make up our minds, dear uncle, to live at Beauchamp Park with an establishment not suitable to it. I am quite sure that we should not be one bit the less happy for doing so. An establishment means servants, and carriages, and horses, does it not?"

"Exactly so, Helen," he replied.

"Well then, we must do without horses and carriages, and manage so cleverly as not to want many servants. I will be your lady's maid, Anne, if you will be mine. Shall we?"

"I can dress hair," returned Anne, joyfully clapping her hands.

“ And I can iron beautifully,” returned Helen, with equal glee, “ and as to my dear aunt,” she continued in a more grave and business-like tone, “ she can take her own factotum Martha with her, and her own cook too, and her own nice neat footman, and so you see, we shall not want anything but a housemaid to dust and sweep the rooms a little, for to be sure it is a very large house.”

“ Yes, it certainly is a large house,” returned Mr. Rixley, smiling. “ But you have not provided for your equipage, Miss Beauchamp. What sort of carriage do you propose to have?”

“ Why, Mr. Rixley, as far as I myself am concerned, I should prefer a donkey for the present ; and as I know that donkeys are neither very troublesome nor expensive, I think we may afford to keep another for Anne ; and then I think that we two should be as independent, and as well able to explore all the country round us quite as much as prudent young ladies ought to desire. As to my aunt, and you, uncle, if I might have my own way, and that we should not

find it too extravagant, I should like to have a comfortable little open carriage, so light that it might be drawn by a pony, like Mr. Bolton's, you know, uncle. And as to my cousin Henry, if he will be very agreeable and very obedient, Anne and I will give him leave to follow our donkeys with a stick in his hand, to keep them in order."

"Upon my word, Helen," said her uncle, who had listened to her smilingly, but with a good deal of attention—"upon my word, I think you seem to have a very fair notion of good management; and if you are pretty tolerably in earnest in your little sketch, I really think this rather startling scheme may be put in execution without much danger of our disgracing ourselves by running in debt; but young as you are, my dear girl, I am mistaken in you if you cannot perceive, as clearly as I do myself, that there would be something lamentably disgraceful in an elderly clergyman, who, living very quietly, and with the most strict economy, during his past life, should suddenly place himself at the head of a splendid establishment as the guardian of a wealthy ward, and

then run her into debt and difficulties in order to indulge his family by letting them live in a fine house."

To which Helen, who, in her turn, had listened with great attention, replied, "I do not believe, uncle Rixley, that you could yourself shrink from such a scandal as this with more terror and abhorrence than I should do." And then she paused. The colour had mounted to her cheeks, and she had uttered the words with something more than gravity; the term solemnity would describe her manner better.

"Heaven forbid," she resumed, "that I should ever bring disgrace or difficulty upon you in any way."

The effect which the words of Mr. Rixley had produced was certainly greater than he intended; and he resumed, in a lighter tone, "Nay, dearest Helen, do not look so frightened! I really believe that we may do all you propose, and a little more, perhaps, without any risk of outrunning the income allowed you. I am but a poor man in comparison to my late brother; but the income we spent in Davies Street will come in aid of your

allowance at Beauchamp Park. But remember that there must be no mistake. It is your establishment, my dear, and not mine, which is about to be *monté* there. It must be Miss Beauchamp's house, remember, and not Mr. Rixley's.

"Nay! do not burden my young head so heavily!" replied Helen, laughing. "Let there be no division between thy house and my house. Let it be for all of us, 'our house at home.'"

"So it shall, my dear child!" said Mrs. Rixley, justly appreciating the feeling which had brought a tear to the eye and a flush to the cheek of Helen; "and I am very sanguine in my belief that 'our house at home' will be a very happy one."

"May I," said Henry, suddenly starting up, and placing himself immediately before Helen, with a solemn reverence—"may I say one little word for myself at this propitious moment? May I venture to petition for permission to fish and to shoot occasionally within your domain?"

Helen returned his salute with a very dignified bow, and replied gracefully, extend-

ing her hand towards his father, " That gentleman, sir, is my man-of-business: it is his permission you must seek for, and not mine. Nor can you be offended by this reference, young gentleman, when I tell you that it is my intention never to do anything without obtaining it myself.

CHAPTER VII.

No further discussion was necessary to confirm the decision arrived at in this half-playful conversation. Had all those who had assisted at it been as grave in their demeanour as the Council of the Propaganda, they could not have been more in earnest in wishing to change their residence from Davies Street to Beauchamp Park.

Nor, in sober earnest, was there the least imprudence in their doing so. An establishment prepared conscientiously for a girl of fourteen is a very different affair from what the same individual might reasonably require some half-dozen years afterwards ; and not only her guardian, but her guardian's family, were so perfectly well aware of this, that

while greatly enjoying the idea of a long sojourn in so agreeable a residence, there was not one of them who would not have shrunk from, and rejected, any project for placing themselves *pro tempore* in a station and style which was not properly their own.

Helen's programme, however, was considerably improved upon and enlarged.

Instead of the one-horse chair, 'like Mr. Bolton's,' they had a one-horse car, which, in very pleasant Irish fashion, could contain them all. Beyond the allowance entrusted to her guardian for maintenance of the heiress, a very sufficient sum was allotted for keeping up the place in general, and the beautiful gardens in particular—an arrangement which very happily enabled the ladies of the party to indulge themselves with a safe conscience in all the luxury that lawns and shrubberies, fruits and flowers, could give.

There had been so much of common sense, and of something more than common decision, in the manner in which Helen had put her veto upon the pursuit of accomplishments, that Mr. Rixley, after discussing the question with his wife, decided that it would

be better to let her have her own way in this matter, illustrating his opinion by a parody, showing that—

Those who are taught against their will,
Remain in native ignorance still.

To which his wife had replied, “ I believe so ;” adding, moreover, that the native ignorance of Helen seemed of a quality that might be preferred by many to all the artistic accomplishments that could be taught her. “ Her sketches,” continued Mrs. Rixley, are more like pictures left upon her memory, than drawings made according to rule ; and as to her music, both in singing and playing, there is something much more like inspiration than art. So that, on the whole, I am very decidedly of your opinion, that we had better let her have her own way.”

So, from that time forward, Helen Beauchamp heard no more about masters.

But there were other points of her education, concerning which her guardian uncle felt a good deal of interest. Her own definition of the system she thought necessary, contained in the words, ‘ read, read, read,’ had struck him as not precisely devoid of

reason, but as being, nevertheless, rather too indefinite to be quite satisfactory. He accordingly took an opportunity, when they were *tête-à-tête* together, of asking her (after he had quoted her own words to her) whether her '*read, read, read,*' was meant to be indiscriminately applied to every book that came in her way.

"Not exactly that, uncle," she replied; "for I would avoid, if I could, ever reading anything that was very silly or very wicked. It would be such loss of time."

"It might be worse than that, Helen," replied Mr. Rixley. "You might read what would be injurious to you."

"Perhaps; but I don't think it very likely," she replied.

"Why not?" said he. "I assure you, my dear child, that people who read indiscriminately every book that comes in their way run a great risk of meeting with what they had better avoid."

"In the way of silliness, or of wickedness, uncle?" asked Helen.

"Both, my dear, both," was the reply.

"I don't feel afraid of it," she replied;

“for I don’t think, if the reading silly books would make me silly, there could be much mischief in that, for there must be a sympathising silliness here,” touching her forehead, “already. And as to wicked books, I think that in the first place they are not very likely to come in my way ; and if they did, I think I should put them out of it.”

“Yes, I am sure you would, if they were of that species which carries evil legibly marked upon it. Danger to you from such as these, I can easily believe would not be great. It is where the mischief is more concealed that danger lies. Very persevering and very promiscuous readers can scarcely hope to escape occasionally getting hold of reasonings that may be more specious than sound.”

“Yes, uncle Rixley,” replied Helen, while an expression of deep thoughtfulness took possession of her beautiful young features, “I think so too. But then I cannot help thinking, also, that our own opinions, and our own feelings about what is right or wrong, would be of little worth, and little utility to us, if we adopted them only because

we had found the like in a book that we have been told by our friends is a good book. It would be very easy for us, certainly, to learn by rote the pages upon which these thoughts and opinions are inscribed; but having done so, I do not feel that I should have any right to call such thoughts and opinions my own. It seems to me, that one must think, and think, and think, a great deal before we can honestly say that we have got an opinion about anything."

"Then why do you conceive it to be so necessary to read, read, read, my dear Helen, if you believe that it is only by the process of thinking that you can arrive at the truth?" inquired her uncle.

"I hav'nt said *that*, uncle Rixley," replied Helen with quickness. "Our thoughts would be in the state of the sleeping beauty in the fairy tale, if they were never awakened. Every book one reads, if it be worth reading at all, awakens our thoughts, and sets them busily to work. If it be a statement of facts, we weigh, as it were, the value of them, and pass judgment upon the actors, and in doing this, you know, we actually *do* form opinions

—we actually may be said to think. If our book gives us theories, of course we begin thinking again directly, to find out whether we can receive them as true. And if the book be imaginative, oh ! then do we not enjoy ourselves, and feel as if we were born into another new world, perhaps almost as beautiful as that in which we live, and in some respects more beautiful still.”

Her uncle looked at her beautiful animated face with a great deal of affection and some little surprise, and said to her, but by no means in a tone offensively inquisitorial, “ Will you tell me, Helen, how it has happened that, living so much out of the reach of educated society as you must have done, you should at an unusually early age have acquired, as you evidently have done, habits of reading and of thinking by no means very common among young ladies, even when they have all appliances and means to boot ? Tell me, dear child, how you contrived to learn all that you seem to know ? ”

“ Dear, dear, uncle Rixley,” returned Helen, colouring violently, “ do not let me take you in, by telling you that I am bold

enough to think of countless thousands of things that I know nothing about. I believe in my heart that I *know* less than almost any body in the world; and the chief thing that has convinced me of my own ignorance has been the reading every sort of book that I could get hold of. Now, you know, uncle, that one cannot read any books at all without finding out that the people who wrote them understood all the things, however difficult or mysterious, about which they wrote, or at least that they honestly believe in their own hearts that they do; while I only feel as I read and read that as yet I know nothing! But I don't suppose that my mind is old enough to have got all its strength yet; and I hope the time will come when I may in my turn honestly be able to say to myself I know *this*, or I know *that*. The only people that I think I should ever be inclined to envy are those who know, *really know*, more than others; and that is my great notion about being in heaven, uncle Rixley."

"And my notion about you, my dear Helen," he replied, "is that you have been in the habit of thinking too largely, if I may

so use the word, for your age. I suspect that you have spent too many hours alone, my dear child."

"I don't know, uncle. I have been often very happy when alone," she answered. "Since mamma died," she continued, "I should have been very badly off, if I could not have amused myself with my books and my thoughts. My dear good Sarah Lambert was almost always very busy about the house, and my only other companion"—and here she stopped abruptly; the bright blood mounted to her cheeks, she fixed her eyes upon the ground, and an air of stiff reserve seemed to take possession of her, as different as possible from her usual manner when conversing with her uncle.

He looked at her for a moment, both with surprise and pain; but during that moment it suddenly occurred to him, that although several weeks had elapsed since she first became a member of his family, the name of *William* had never been mentioned in her hearing. This silence had arisen on his part, and on that of his family also, entirely from consideration for her feelings. He knew

how tremendously she had suffered from his sudden disappearance, and had taught his family to be as cautious as himself in avoiding every allusion to a subject which, notwithstanding the rapid recovery of her health, might he feared be still too agitating for her to enter upon without suffering.

But he now fancied that he saw in her manner a sudden air of restraint, when thus evidently about to allude to her brother, which seemed to proceed from a fear lest his name might not be freely spoken before him.

Determined at once to remove this impression, if indeed it really existed, he said, affectionately taking her hand, "your only other companion, dear Helen, was your brother William, of whom we all earnestly hope that we shall soon hear tidings—he must, indeed, have been your best companion, then—what were you going to say about him, Helen?" "My dear, dear uncle," sobbed the poor girl, throwing her arms around his neck, "I thought you meant that I was never to hear his name, and that I was never to speak of him again!"

“How greatly then have you mistaken us all!” he eagerly replied. “Believe me, Helen, our only reason for not naming him was the fear least your spirits were not yet sufficiently recovered from all the agitation you underwent at Crumpton to make it prudent to allude to it as yet.”

“Your speaking to me as you do now, uncle Rixley,” said Helen, holding his hand caressingly between hers, “will do more towards restoring me to all my former health and strength than anything else in the world! You have been so very kind to me from the first moment I saw you—and you have all, every one of you, been so very kind to me, that I should like to live with you without having a single secret from you in the world! But this could never be if I might not talk to you about William. I will not do it very much either, that is before you have seen and know him yourselves, because it is impossible that anything I could say could make you understand what sort of a person he is, and without that, all I could say about him would only sound like nonsense to you. For I do not believe there

is any body in the world like him. My mamma had a great collection of beautiful engravings, portraits of all sorts of distinguished people, but not one of the whole set could be compared to my brother William, either for handsomeness, or for that noble air of pride and courage, that made him look so much like one of the famous heroes one reads of in history. I do assure you, uncle Rixley," she added, after a short pause, during which she closed her eyes as if turning their speculating power inwards, "that he was the handsomest and cleverest person I ever saw, and I should say that he was the kindest and the best too, were it not that I have sometimes seen him, at least I saw him *once*, give way to very violent passion. That moment was very terrible. I cannot forget it. I am afraid I never shall forget it! But though his temper was certainly very quick and fiery, I never was really frightened at his violence but once."

In saying this Helen became extremely pale, and her uncle felt that, notwithstanding her rapid recovery from the frightful fever that had seemed to threaten her life,

her nerves were still in much too excitable a state to make it prudent to continue a conversation which affected her so deeply.

“Your strong affection for your brother goes farther towards convincing me that he must have great and good qualities, Helen, than any description of him could do. But we can neither of us do him any good by recurring to the painful scene to which you have just alluded, and let us therefore be wise enough to avoid discussing it. You may be very sure, my dear love, that as soon as any intelligence respecting his movements reaches Mrs. Lambert, it will be forwarded immediately to you; and from all I have heard of her, she is not a person likely to relax in her efforts to discover him. It strikes me, Helen, that the most reasonable interpretation to put upon his absence is, that being conscious himself of the unseemly violence which he manifested upon the painful occasion you have mentioned, he thought it better to withdraw himself for a time, trusting to his talents, of which he must be conscious, for support, than to run the risk of being again irritated beyond his patience.

And, perhaps, my dear child, he was right. If this be so, and it certainly is very reasonable to hope it, we may some day have the pleasure of seeing him return, to look for his dear sister; and the position in which he will find you, Helen, will speedily turn all his sorrow into joy. But, for the present, let us all resolve not to torment ourselves by idle conjecture."

Helen listened to him as if her life hung upon the words he uttered. But these words, though both reasonable and soothing, did not reach the point to which all her thoughts were directed. She would have given a finger, could she have conveyed to her uncle's mind all the thoughts which, for the last six or seven weeks, had been incessantly at work within her own, provided only that, having done so, she might have heard him declare decidedly, and without restraint, whether he thought it within the reach of moral possibility that her brother William could be guilty of the crime that had been imputed to him.

But upon this occasion, and at one or two subsequent opportunities that she had met,

or made, when she had employed all the skill she possessed in order to make her uncle talk freely to her about him, she so completely failed, that at length she resolutely determined never to make the same attempt again, till some event had occurred, or some information had reached them, which must of necessity prevent her uncle, so kindly and flatteringly confidential to her on all other subjects, from being so mysteriously silent on this.

Her keeping this resolution—and she did keep it strictly, including every member of the family in her reserve—was so far beneficial, both to herself and to them, that it spared her the painful embarrassment of inventing opportunities of recurring to the painful theme, and it spared them the equally-painful task of seeking to avoid it.

To the Rixley family, this was really an unmixed good; for, as far as they knew, there was no disadvantage of any kind to set against it. But the case was different with Helen. It is true, indeed, that her constant intercourse with the family into which she was so affectionately adopted was no longer

embarrassed by her perpetually looking out for opportunities to make them talk on the only subject they wished to avoid. But this advantage did not come unmixed to Helen; for the finding that she could not talk about William, and the dreadful accusation that had been brought against him, only made her think of him, and of it, the more: and the consequence of this was, that the recollection of him, and everything connected with him, and with her early life, frequently made a melancholy theme for her secret meditations, and in the midst of all the cheerful hilarity inevitably produced by her very happy position, as well as by her age and natural disposition, she was often seen musing, with an expression of painful anxiety upon her beautiful features, which distressed, as much as it puzzled, those around her.

Of Mrs. Lambert, she, for many months, heard nothing; but at length, a letter arrived from her, addressed to Mr. Rixley, which was as follows:—

“REVEREND AND HONOURED SIR,

“I HAVE faithfully kept the promise I gave to seek tidings of William, commonly called Rixley (the natural son of your late brother, Mr. Rixley Beauchamp), by every means in my power; but my success has been very limited. I know not where he actually is, nor where he is at all likely to be; but I have ascertained, beyond a doubt, that he had sailed from the coast of England before it was possible that tidings of any of the events which followed his departure from the Warren House could have reached him; and this perfectly accounts for his lengthened absence. Knowing, as I do, the estimable character, and the great abilities of this unfortunate young man, I cannot doubt but that he will, without difficulty, be able to maintain himself, let him go where he will; and those who best love him will not only find comfort from this consideration, but from remembering that his leaving home in the sudden and clandestine manner that we know he did, was *more* than excusable in him. Few people, in fact, if they knew what he had really suffered in that home,

could doubt the wisdom and propriety of his leaving it.—And as to the cruel accusation that was made against him, no reasonable person could give credit to what is thus wildly asserted without a shadow of proof. I address myself to you, reverend and honoured sir, in preference to the ever-dear young lady, your niece and ward, because, after much thinking on the subject, I have convinced myself that, had I the power of renewing my former familiar intercourse with her, it would be my duty not to avail myself of it, inasmuch, as it would be more advantageous to her that I should not do it. Had my former intercourse with her been merely that of a servant, I should be proud and happy to wait upon her in that capacity still. But many circumstances rendered this impossible in the house of her father; and were I again near her, I might find it difficult, if not impossible, to behave to Miss Beauchamp in the way that her servants ought to behave to her. I shall serve her better at a distance, by endeavouring to find her brother. Have the kindness, sir, to present my duty to her, and tell her that the

great object of my life shall be to bring back her noble-hearted brother to his country. Have the kindness, sir, to tell her, also, to make her generous heart quite easy as to my means of living. The small house and garden left to me by my mother has been purchased, at a great price, by the shipping interest at Falmouth, in consequence of its vicinity to the harbour. I remain, with profound duty and respect, both your and her obedient servant,

“ SARAH LAMBERT.”

The first perusal of this letter produced torrents of tears from Helen; but, after allowing them to flow without interruption for some minutes, her uncle checked them, by saying, “ You should not weep so bitterly, dear Helen, because a person whom you love has acted from a sense of duty, instead of being influenced by any other motive. Mrs. Lambert is right, Helen, and I feel both respect and gratitude towards her for pursuing a line of conduct that, I am quite sure, must be painful to her, solely because her good, clear judgment tells her that it is right. I honour her for her conduct.”

“Then I am quite sure that I ought to honour her too,” said poor Helen, hanging her head and looking as if it were easier to say what ought to be done, than to do it.

“It would be scarcely reasonable at this moment to expect that you should approve her conduct,” resumed her uncle, “because it must of necessity give you pain. But you will judge her more reasonably when you are older. She says most truly that the terms upon which you have hitherto lived together, are not such as could be adopted with propriety by Miss Beauchamp. Your relations have claims upon you as well as your old servant, dear Helen, and a little sober reflection will soon make you understand that Mrs. Lambert is right.”

“If you say it, and if she thinks it too, uncle, I am already quite sure of it—I only wish that doing right was not so very painful!” she replied.

Mr. Rixley was too wise to lead her into any farther discussion on the subject; and Helen was too wise to let him, or any one else, perceive how difficult she found it to convert Helen Rixley, into Miss Beauchamp.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the whole, however, it would have been well nigh impossible to have devised a better course than that taken by Mrs. Lambert to complete the transition of Helen Rixley of the Warren House, to Helen Beauchamp of Beauchamp Park. That it was painful was certain, but there was no mixture either of reproach, or repentance in her feelings, and moreover there was a vague hope at the bottom of her young heart that the time might come when her situation would be sufficiently independent of circumstances, and usages, to enable her once again to press Sarah Lambert to her heart without feeling that she was doing an injury to herself, or to any body else.

The wound made by her separation from William was of a very different kind ; but she never alluded to it in any way, for she was, somehow or other, quite aware that it would not be healed by family discussion, for that the subject was one of the very few upon which those around her could not sympathise with her feelings.

And thus it came to pass that neither Mrs. Lambert, nor William were any more mentioned among them, but nevertheless they were not forgotten by Helen. Her meditations respecting them however, were, so to speak, of a different quality. The image of Mrs. Lambert never rose to her memory without creating a feeling of affectionate childlike tenderness, and had the object of this very natural feeling not withdrawn herself, it might for ever have been kept alive in the heart of her nursling, and would have been a source of great pleasure to her, had she been permitted to prove her grateful and affectionate feelings by such acts of liberality as her generous temper, and ample means would have led her to perform. But as it was, the recollection of this dearly

beloved nurse gradually melted as it were into the mass of all other childish memories of things past, and if Sarah Lambert was no longer a source of happiness to her, the recollection of her did not become a source of suffering.

But far different was the impression left upon her mind by the loss of William. He alone of all the human beings she had ever known had ever been, properly speaking, her companion. They had discoursed together of things vastly beyond the comprehension of either, but nevertheless this converse had been the most precious recreation that Helen had ever known, and though she had of late heard it perpetually proclaimed, either overtly or covertly, that she was beautiful, intelligent and charming, in all manner of ways, the only thing that really awakened a feeling of vanity within her was the recollection of having seen her brother William close many a volume in which he was interested in order to converse with her.

Had this been all that remained upon her memory of the days that were gone, her thoughts might have dwelt upon it both

with pride and pleasure. But unfortunately that was not all. She remembered the agony she had so often seen him suffer, not from the unkindness of his brutal father—for from his babyhood he had been too much accustomed to this, to heed it—but from the insulting tone of degradation in which it was his custom, and evidently his pleasure, to address him. She remembered how she had seen the warm young blood rush to his cheek upon these occasions, and then forsake it till he looked both ghastly pale, and fearfully indignant.

And even had this been all it would not have mattered much, for it might only have served to remind her that their being orphans was a dispensation of providence which could not reasonably in their case be lamented as a misfortune.

But it was in vain that she endeavoured to remember this, and this alone. Her father's violent death, and the great improbability of its being the consequence of his own act, as far at least as she had the power of judging, forced upon her the horrible belief that he had been murdered. But beyond

this, it would be in vain to attempt to follow her reasonings. Every thing was vague, nay every thing was contradictory.

She felt at her heart's core that the base and cruel insults which had been heaped upon William, and upon William's mother, in the hearing both of herself and Sarah Lambert, were such as might explain, though they could not justify a degree of indignation, and of rage which might have led to horrible results; but just as her reasonings had reached this point, she remembered also, with a rush of compunction and remorse that wrung torturing tears from her eyes, that of every human being she had ever known, heard, or read of, her brother William was the last whose noble nature was likely to be so overpowered by rage as to make him capable of the most awful crime of which human nature could be guilty.

These painful reveries lasted longer than any one domesticated with Helen could have believed possible, for from a very early period of her domestication in her uncle's family she had, as if by instinct, become aware that notwithstanding the gentle and even cautious

manner with which they listened to her expressions of wonder and regret at not receiving any letter from Sarah Lambert, they did not share her regret upon the subject.

Having once made this remark, everything which followed strengthened it; and though she could not, from her total ignorance of the facts, do them anything at all approaching to justice while meditating upon the causes of this seemingly cold indifference, she immediately resolved that she would not make herself troublesome by alluding to feelings in which they did not share.

This deficiency in sympathy was very nearly as visible on the subject of her brother, as in the case of her nurse, and the same resolution on her part was the result. Helen, for her age, had very great command of herself, and therefore not any one of her new family, notwithstanding their constantly affectionate communion with her, had any notion how many of her night thoughts were occupied by meditations concerning this lost brother; yet nevertheless her health, her beauty, her intelligence, went on improving,

and at seventeen, the eventful period to which we must now transport her, it would have been difficult to trace either in her appearance or manners, any trace of either objectionable associations, or defective education.

And yet on this latter point she had had some very strange notions of her own, for though when transplanted into her uncle's family she was still young enough to have profited by the attendance of masters, if she would have submitted to it, she so resolutely resisted all the arguments used to induce her to do so, that the attempt was soon given up as hopeless, and Helen remained to the end of her days without receiving any more instruction in the shape of lessons, than she had brought with her from the Warren House.

However, she read largely, and thought much; and this prevented her being quite as much behind hand in mental developement as many persons acquainted with her early history might have expected.

Neither were the advantages which she gained in respect to society by her exchanging Crumpton Warren House for Beauchamp

Park, at all lost upon her, either as a matter of pleasure or profit.

Nothing could be more kind or more judicious than the conduct of her uncle and aunt towards her. She was certainly not one of those admirable young ladies who have no will of their own—Helen very decidedly had a will of her own—but as she was not at all obstinate, and by no means very unreasonable, everything went on smoothly, and nothing in the least degree approaching a dispute ever occurred between them. On the whole, therefore, my heroine was a very happy girl, although, at the bottom of her heart, she had a sorrow, which, if it did not actually rankle and torment her, was never quite forgotten.

CHAPTER IX.

It happened on a certain morning in the springtide of the year, that Helen, who was ever the earliest riser of the family, was returning from one of her long solitary morning walks, which had taken her considerably beyond the boundaries of her own beautiful park, when she saw her cousin Henry sitting in very melancholy and Jaques-like fashion, on the root of a venerable thorn, which spread its silver awning over the only bit of open brierless turf to be found within the shelter of the thick copse through which she was passing.

Her light step had brought her very near him before he perceived her, but when he did he started as violently as if he had seen a ghost.

“Have I frightened you, Henry?” said she, laughing.

“I suppose it would disgrace my noble courage did I say yes,” he replied, “but I should disgrace my sincerity if I said no.”

“I have frightened you, actually frightened you then, have I?” said she. “This will be something to boast of.”

“Not much, Helen. I believe a mouse might easily have achieved as much,” said he.

“Shall I guess what you were thinking of,” she returned, as he rose up, and joined her.

“You may, an if you will, cousin,” returned Henry, with a very melancholy smile.

“Very well, then, so I will. You were thinking of your pony, and your fishing, and your waltzing with Mary Jackson; while, in the midst of all these beautiful visions, the spectre of your Oxford gown and cap to be put on next week, so completely appalled your spirit as to throw you very nearly into a state of insensibility, from which my approach aroused you with very startling, not to say terrifying, effect.”

“ Yes, that was it, cousin Helen,” said he, gravely.

But why should this produce a more painful effect upon you now, dear Henry, than it has ever done before ? ”

“ As you seem determined to bring me to confession, I will answer this question too, though it is a searching one,” he replied. “ The reason is this, Helen, I have hitherto lived a very happy, because a very thoughtless, life. I have enjoyed going to College, and I have enjoyed returning home—to our ‘ *happy house at home*,’ dear Helen. But now the case is altered. Thought will come—must come—sooner or later, to us all. I suppose you do not know, for I dare say my faithful Anne has never told you, that I very greatly dislike the profession which my good father tells me is the only one that is open to me. I dislike, for many reasons, the idea of going into the church. I do not think I am fitted for it in any way, and I do think I am fitted for other things. I would rather a thousand times be sent on the most dangerous mission that they could find for me in India than take holy orders. I am fit for

the one, and if I should be shot, there would be no great harm done, and poor Anne would be a few thousand pounds the richer, but to be a clergyman I am not fit; and yet, you know, I am to set off on Monday expressly for the purpose of taking my degree, and, after that, a very few weeks more will see me a clergyman."

Helen was pained. It was evident that he was very much in earnest, and the misfortune of which he complained was not one for which it was very easy to find a remedy. She walked on beside him in silence for a minute or two after he had ceased to speak, and then she said, "Have you ever confessed to your father, Henry, how much you dislike the plan he has laid down for you?"

"Yes, Helen. I have done so as earnestly as it was in my power to do it."

"And how did he receive your remonstrance?"

"With a look of despair that it is painful to me to remember," he replied. "He implored me not to make him feel that he had been guilty of a crime in marrying without

having sufficient means to provide for his children according to their wishes. In short, I had rather do the deed at once than offer any farther opposition to his wishes."

"You are a dear good fellow, Henry! It would be a sin to try to shake such a resolution as that," replied Helen. "But though opposition to so excellent a father would be very painful, and might perhaps be very wrong, I can see no mischief, nor any danger of it from delay. Take my advice in this, Henry, as you often have done in lesser matters. Return to Oxford and take your degree, and exert all your faculties to make it a creditable one. The doing this cannot fail of being advantageous to you, let your future walk be what it may. When you have achieved this, ask your father frankly to give you a little breathing time before you take orders."

Henry took a deep breath. "Even that," he said, "would be a great relief."

"Then I am very glad I suggested it to you," said Helen, kindly. "I am quite sure that I can have done no harm by that. But tell me," she added, "have you never

spoken as freely to dear Anne as you have now done to me on this subject?"

"Oh! yes. A hundred times, I am afraid, or rather more," he replied.

"Then how comes it that you have neither of you ever alluded to the subject when talking to me? You may have been right in abstaining from it with your father, but surely there could have been no harm in your confiding your troubles to me."

"I am not sure of that, dear Helen," he replied, "nor is Anne, either, for we have often discussed the point together; and, at last, we both agreed that it would be a bad return for all the happiness we have owed to you, if we took it into our heads to prove our friendship by pouring forth all our miseries upon you. No, dear Helen, if you had not cross-examined me so cleverly you would never have learnt what a rebellious heart was hid under my seeming conformity."

"Do not say so, Henry!" she replied, affectionately. "I would much rather owe my knowledge of your position, which I certainly never understood before—I would much rather owe it to your confidence in

my discretion, than to my own skill in cross-examination."

"And in sober earnest, Helen, you do owe it to my confidence in you," he replied; "nor would you have been so long without knowing all that I have now told you, but for the reason I have already stated to you. Anne has repeatedly asked me to let her tell you all our troubles, but I have always ended such discussions by convincing her that it was very wanton cruelty to make you uncomfortable about it, as it was totally out of your power to do us any good. However, I honestly confess that I have changed my mind upon the subject, for I think it will be a great comfort to Anne, when I am gone, to know that she *may* converse with you on this subject, as on all others, without restraint. And see! Here she comes as if on purpose to meet us. I should not be much surprised if she were to guess what we were talking about so very earnestly."

"We are waiting breakfast for you, Helen," said Anne, as she approached them. "But what are you two in such solemn conversation about?"

"I have followed your advice at last, Anne," replied her brother. "Helen knows all the disobedient struggles of my rebellious spirit, and when I am gone back to Oxford she will listen as kindly and as patiently to your lamentations over me, as she has now been doing to mine."

"That I am sure she will, if you have been really explaining everything to her, and it will be the greatest possible comfort to me to have a dear friendly ear open to receive my moans and groans—for I really am very miserable about you, Henry."

"It is possible, young as she is," replied he, "that she may do something more than listen to your moans and groans, for she has been already giving me counsel that has brought an immensity of comfort with it. But there stands my father at the breakfast-room window, not looking impatient, for that is not in his nature, but decidedly looking very hungry."

Anne was quite right in prognosticating great comfort and consolation from the removal of all restraint from her intercourse with her young cousin, but this could not

put off the melancholy day of Henry's departure, or prevent the sad impression left upon her heart by the parting look he gave her, while listening to the gay expression of his father's hope that the next time he left them would be to receive ordination from their good friend the Bishop.

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CHAPTER X.

It must not be supposed, though nothing has been hitherto said on the subject, that the beautiful heiress of Beauchamp Park had been permitted to attain the age of seventeen years without having made some acquaintance with her neighbours.

During the first year or two of her residence on the domain she had so strangely inherited, her guardian uncle, who was really conscientious almost to excess, avoided the hospitable advances of the neighbourhood; not from an unsocial temper, but because he felt that he should not like to receive hospitality without returning it, and that this return could only be made at the expense of Helen, who was as yet too young either to make or receive dinner visits.

But Miss Beauchamp was rather a precocious, and rather a self-willed young lady, and by the time she had reached her sixteenth birthday she had not only made up her mind upon the subject of family visiting in general, but very resolutely determined to take the management of the business into her own hands.

Not all her little efforts, and they had not been sparingly repeated, could prevent her uncle from betraying in various ways, that he had not forgotten that neither the house nor the revenue which supported it were his own. The consciousness that such were his feelings was a great annoyance to Helen, but she quietly made up her mind to endure it till she should be *as tall as her aunt*; nor had she very long to wait for this much-coveted dignity of appearance, and when her sixteenth birthday arrived, she took care to make this evident, by requesting that they might both be measured against the library door, when the fact of her not only having reached, but surpassed this desired standard, was most satisfactorily proved to the whole family.

"Then now, I suppose, I can no longer be accounted a child?" said Helen, addressing herself to her aunt.

"No, truly, Helen, I think you look almost as old as your grown-up cousin Anne," replied Mrs. Rixley, with great sincerity.

"And you, uncle? Do you think I look like a child?" she said, addressing Mr. Rixley in a tone that had more of earnest than jest in it.

"No, Helen," he answered with equal gravity, "you certainly do not."

"Nor do I any longer feel like a child. The last few years of my life, have, I think, produced the effect of many years upon me," returned Helen thoughtfully.

"I doubt it not," replied her uncle. "The changes which have happened to you during that interval, have been quite enough to produce this effect; and moreover, Helen, you are, I suspect, rather addicted to meditation, and this is a temperament which makes us feel old."

"That accounts for it, uncle! That accounts for all the busy thoughts that I

feel working within me," returned Helen, laughing. "Do not be frightened if I tell you that these busy thoughts suggest to me the idea that I should like for us all to see a little more of our neighbours. They all, as far as I have been able to judge, appear inclined to be very civil to us, but as you do not choose to dine out anywhere, it is of course impossible for me to know much about it. I do not mean to say that I wish to dine out myself just yet, I should be quite contented to wait another whole year before I do that; but if you would ask some of those we like best to dine here, we should soon become better acquainted with them, you know, and they would begin again to ask you to dine with them in return; and then all sorts of sociable meetings would be set going among us, and if I am to live here always, I think I shall find it very dull if I don't know any of my neighbours."

Mr. and Mrs. Rixley looked at each other with something a little like dismay. There was just enough of truth and reason in the young lady's remonstrance to make it difficult to answer her. Her uncle, how-

ever, like a sensible man as he was, took the right way, for he immediately told her the truth.

“We are not rich enough, Helen,” said he, “to visit the principal families within visiting distance, upon terms of equality. Have you forgotten the discussion we had together on this subject before we finally decided that we might all venture to live here together during your minority? Have you forgotten the style of establishment which you recommended in order to enable us to do so without imprudence?”

“No, uncle Rixley, I have not forgotten one word of that discussion; nor shall I ever forget the kindness which induced you to yield to my wishes, though the doing so was in so great a degree to banish you from society. But the state of the case is different now, and I begin to know you so well, that I feel certain that you will feel many more scruples about my having no society than about your all being deprived of it yourselves.”

He looked furtively at his wife, and smiled. “There might be something in

that," he said, "were it not that the friendly attentions of our neighbours have by no means relaxed so much as we had reason to expect they might have done upon discovery that we were not diners out."

"But I do not like that their attentions should relax at all," said Helen, "and I think it would be bad management on my part were I to begin my career by living as a stranger among those whom I ought to make my friends."

"But how is it to be avoided, Helen? Everything in the way of expenditure goes smoothly now, but it would be very much the reverse if you entered upon a system of receiving dinner company," returned her uncle.

"I know it, uncle Rixley," she replied. "But I know also that an additional thousand a year would enable us to do this without any imprudence at all; and this thousand a year, if added to my savings, could never be of such advantage, or such pleasure to me, as the spending it now, in the manner I propose, nor do I think it at all likely that this addition would not be

made to my allowance, if the reason for its being asked for were explained."

Whether it were the wisdom or the wilfulness of this remonstrance which did most in obtaining its success may be doubtful, but it is certain that no further opposition was offered to the hospitable wishes of the young heiress. The increased allowance was asked for, and immediately granted, and very little time was lost before her sociable projects were in full activity; the car was changed for a very respectable barouche, which, either as an open carriage or a close one, could convey the whole party. A butler, too, worthy of Beauchamp Park, was added to their establishment, together with sundry other minor appurtenances necessary to the projected alteration in the family proceedings.

The prognostic of Helen respecting the facility of speedily increasing the frequency of their intercourse with their neighbours proved perfectly correct; and this was doubtless rendered more easy by the explicit avowal of the motives which led the Beauchamp Park family to wish for it.

The beautiful girl, who had hitherto only been occasionally seen during a morning visit, now always took her place on her uncle's right hand at table, and her manner of assisting her aunt in receiving their guests in the drawing-room was soon spoken of in the neighbourhood as the perfection of youthful grace, and lady-like demeanour.

But Helen was quite as self-willed in the limits she placed to her own share of these neighbourly sociabilities, as she had been in establishing them. She positively, absolutely, and stedfastly, refused to dine in company anywhere but at home; and though this resolution was almost clamorously combated by every family in the neighbourhood, and with especially earnest eloquence where there were grown-up sons, the pretty heiress only gave a smiling 'no' in return; but all this might have been fairly recorded by the well-known line:—

'Oft she rejects, but never once offends.'

Few themes are more fertile to memorialists of my stamp than a well varied set of 'country neighbours,' but I do not mean to indulge in it now. There was to be found

in a circle of about fourteen miles diameter round Beauchamp Park about the usual proportion of talent and inanity, warm hearts and cold ones, sense and nonsense, worth and worthlessness, and though the individual specimens of each class might be easily sketched, so as not to mimic humanity too abominably, I do not mean to indulge myself by making the attempt. I may indeed have occasion to allude to some of them subsequently, but as there was only one family who were of any real importance to my narrative at this time, I shall for the present restrict my descriptions to them.

The name of this family was Harrington, and it consisted of father, mother, two daughters, and one son, or more correctly of one son, and two daughters, for the young man was not only the only son, and the heir expectant of a splendid property known by the name of Speedhurst Abbey, but he was also the senior of his sisters by several years.

It was with this family—and this family only—that Helen had already, by means of pretty frequent morning visitings, and an

occasional pony car excursion, formed something like an intimate acquaintance.

But it must not be taken for granted, that the above mentioned only son had much to do with all this, for the fact is that at the time at which we have arrived, George Harrington scarcely knew any of the Beauchamp Park family by sight.

It was not only as being the son of his father that this young man was heir to Speedhurst Abbey, and its acres, but as the eldest, and indeed the only nephew of his father's elder brother. This uncle had been a childless widower for the last twenty years, and it was at a time when the father of George was the happy father of three sons, instead of one, that he had consented to the earnest and not unreasonable petition of his brother to make over to his care the boy who was to inherit his property.

For fifteen years after this transfer was made, not one of all the individuals concerned in it had ever been permitted to feel a regret on the subject, for a more amiable, reasonable, or considerate old man than the owner of Speedhurst Abbey never existed, and if

the first object of his life was to make his future heir all that an English gentleman ought to be, and the very happiest boy in the world besides, the second very evidently was to arrange the intercourse between the two families in such a manner as to prevent the parents of George from ever feeling, or fancying, that they had given away their son.

But within six months after George had taken a very brilliant degree at Cambridge, and set off, with a celebrated geologist for his companion, to make his first tour upon the continent, the two fine lads who had prevented his being painfully missed at home became the heroes of one of the most appalling calamities on record, having been both drowned when bathing, within sight of their father.

The eldest son returned to England immediately, and it was to his father's house he then went, as to his future home. It was a tremendous sacrifice that the venerable owner of Speedhurst then offered to make, for no father ever loved a son more devotedly than he loved his heir; but George's father

would not hear of it, and so truly was he in earnest in wishing that the Abbey should still be his son's home, that he was permitted to have his way, and it was still only as a visitor that George occasionally passed a few days with his family.

But it had so happened that some of their intimate morning meetings with the Beauchamp Park family had taken place when he was with them, and though he had once been in his mother's drawing-room when the Rixley family, accompanied by Helen, entered it, he felt himself at liberty, being a total stranger to them all, to leave the room as they came into it, for his horse had been for some time pawing the gravel at the door.

The only observation he made upon them amounted to two questions which he asked his mother on returning from his ride.

"My groom told me that those were the Beauchamp Park people who were coming in, as I went out. That girl in the straw bonnet is pretty-looking, isn't she? Is that the heiress, mother?" said he.

"Yes, and yes," replied his mother. "The first of your questions you would have been

able to answer for yourself, if you had not been in such a violent hurry."

"Don't scold, dear mammy! It was my horse who was in a hurry, and not I. I thought she looked very pretty," he replied.

"Pretty, George!" exclaimed his eldest sister. "I should think you must be the first person who ever applied such an epithet to such a face. Helen Beauchamp is by far the most beautiful person that I ever saw."

"Really Jane? Then I flatter myself that I shall ere long have an opportunity of atoning for my abrupt departure by being permitted to look at her at my leisure."

"You have not much chance of being able to perform this act of penance," said his sister Agnes, "for she never has dined out yet, and she is not to begin till she is seventeen."

"You don't mean to tell me that the tall, graceful creature who passed by me this morning when I was stationed at the door in act to fly, you don't mean to tell me, Agnes, that she is still in the school-room?" he replied.

"I will not answer for her being always in

the school-room, for I do not think her education is conducted at all in a tyrannical style, moreover I doubt if she ever had a governess in her life," returned his sister, "but nevertheless it is a certain fact that she is still so far treated as a child, as not to dine out with the family. However I don't suppose this will last for ever, for it is evident that they are preparing to be more sociable than they were on first coming here, and this is doubtless the preparation for her coming out."

"Which coming out, I presume, you all consider as an event of immense importance to the neighbourhood," said the young man, laughing. "The letting loose a beauty and an heiress in such a quiet little neighbourhood as this, will be something worth watching."

"The Beauchamp Park family will never choose to make themselves very conspicuous, I think, in any way," said Mrs. Harrington. "They are all of them rational, and perfectly unaffected, and the more they mix with the neighbourhood, the better will it be for us all."

This was all that George Harrington had ever seen or known of the family at Beauchamp Park at the period when Helen completed her seventeenth year.

This birth-day was an epoch which she herself had fixed upon as one that was to be very important to her, and so it was; for with the same quiet steadiness with which she had, in fact, regulated the movements of the Rixley family from the time she first became a member of it, she succeeded in obtaining the position and the influence in the household which for some time past it had been her especial object to gain.

I am quite aware that I am not presenting my heroine in a very flattering light to my readers, but if I have not disguised the fact of her being self-willed, I must observe that there were many excuses for her.

Her situation was, in many respects, very peculiar. She was quite conscious that she was well-born (in the common meaning of the phrase), and very wealthy. She was also perfectly aware that she had a fair chance of becoming as well-looking as young ladies in general; nor had she any mis-

givings, notwithstanding the irregular style of her education, concerning her having also a fair proportion, both of intellect and information. But she was conscious too, that, notwithstanding all these advantages, her position was, in many respects, a false and a painful one. She knew, for the circumstance had been more than once discussed before her, that her existence had been perfectly unknown to her uncle's family till the dreadful catastrophe arrived which had made them personally acquainted, and she could not, therefore, but be conscious that when Mr. Rixley came to attend his brother's funeral, he came, presuming himself to be his heir.

She appeared amongst them, therefore, not only as a stranger, but as one who had blighted all their hopes.

The manner in which she had been received among them was such as, under any circumstances, must have won her affection, but the peculiar state of the case made this conduct justly appear to her as noble as it was kind.

This statement may not at first sight

seem to account very satisfactorily for her so speedily determining to have her own way among them ; but, for so young an observer, she showed considerable acuteness in the rapidity with which she discovered that if she wished that they should be benefited in any pecuniary way by her remaining with them, it must be achieved by her having *her* way, and not by the Rixley family having *theirs*. Having made this discovery, and by degrees also the more painful one, that their circumstances were such as to render attention to this point of great importance to them, she very soon determined what her line of conduct should be ; and the excellent judgment with which she arranged her plans, and the steady perseverance with which she adhered to them, must be received in atonement for the unbending pertinacity with which she refused to listen to the occasional remonstrances of her uncle when he fancied that she was in danger of exceeding the liberal allowance of the Court of Chancery. But, in point of fact, Helen knew what she was about a great deal better than her uncle did.

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW days after Henry Rixley's departure for College, which happened at no great distance from the eventful day on which Helen completed her seventeenth year, she once again lingered in the breakfast room after the morning meal was concluded, and upon her cousin Anne's making a movement as if to leave the room, she stopped her, saying "Wait for me one moment, Anne, and we will go to my room together, but I want first to say a few words to my uncle and aunt upon business."

On hearing these words, Mr. Rixley, who had also risen to leave the room, resumed his chair, saying, "At your orders, fair niece. What have you to say to us?"

“ Very little, dear uncle, if you approve my proposal, but a good deal by way of convincing you that I am right, if you should happen to think that I am wrong,” said Helen.

“ Then I shall certainly contradict you at first setting out, for I like to hear you plead,” replied her uncle, laughing.

“ I shall bless you very heartily if upon this particular occasion you will dispense with all pleading, and yield to my wishes. It is not at all an imaginative theme, and if we talk about it all day we shall find no amusement in it, dear uncle,” replied Helen, gravely, “ but I mean that my project shall contain something better, for I flatter myself that it will be useful—useful to me, dear aunt—yes, very useful, as part of my education. In short, I greatly wish that you would permit me to be my own house-keeper.”

The silence of a moment followed this unexpected proposal. Had Helen’s auditors been less convinced of her rectitude of principle, and steadiness of conduct, this silence might have lasted longer, or have ended

differently ; but as it was, the voices of both her uncle and aunt were heard at the same moment uttering nearly the same words, for they were both equally eager to assure her that they saw no objection whatever to her proposal, and that they perfectly agreed with her in thinking that the sooner she learnt the value, and the use of money, the better would be her chance of subsequently managing her own affairs judiciously."

"Ever the same ; ever indulgent, and confiding," exclaimed Helen, and thereupon she kissed them both with the playful eagerness of a happy child ; but tears came into her eyes the moment after, as she added, "God forbid that I should ever give you cause to repent your confidence in me !"

The day on which Helen completed her seventeenth year was the fourth birthday which she had had to celebrate since she had taken up her residence at Beauchamp Park. On occasion of the three first a very modest little fête had been given, at the suggestion of Mr. Rixley, to the half dozen servants which constituted their little household, and the something was repeated on the present,

which afforded, as Mr. Rixley observed, a very convenient opportunity for announcing that the young mistress of the mansion was, from that time forward, to assume the executive reins of management herself; an announcement which would probably have been received with more surprise, had not the beautiful features of Helen already assumed a cast of more thoughtfulness than is common at her age.

In truth poor Helen had long ago begun to feel too acutely, and to think too deeply, not to have lost that airy gaiety of aspect which constitutes so large a portion of what is called, strangely enough, '*La beauté du Diable*.' Her *beauté* was of a different order, and had she been seven-and-twenty, instead of seventeen she could not have received the dutiful bows and curtsies of her household with more sober, though gentle dignity than she did on this occasion; and never probably did a young creature so early and so suddenly assume the management of a family with so little apparent assumption of authority or so much efficient exercise of it.

Fortunately for Helen's comfort, and for

Helen's projects, her uncle Rixley was not a man to adhere to an engagement to the sound and break it to the sense. She had taken care to make it very clearly understood that the portion of their joint income which had come from him should make no part of the sum over which she desired to have control. At first, he had objected to this, telling her that in that case she might find it after all impossible to be, as she wished, her own housekeeper, for that a part of their joint expenses had hitherto been paid by him.

"Of that," she replied, "I am quite aware, my dear uncle, and a part of the expenses may be paid by you still. You must not forget that my allowance has been increased on the plea of my going into company more. But after all, uncle Rixley, I think we are essentially a very domestic family, and the increase which you have asked for, and obtained, will suffice, if I mistake not, for all the increased visitings we shall wish for; that is, provided my aunt and you will make no objection to paying the wages of Amy, who has belonged to you

all so long that I am quite certain she would accept wages from nobody else."

"Very well, my dear, that is very kindly thought of, and may be easily managed. But what sum do you propose I should pay you for the maintenance of myself and my family?"

Helen coloured a little, and looked somewhat embarrassed, but after the silence of a moment she recovered herself, and said, "I had hoped, dear uncle, that you would kindly have consented to become my guests till some reason should arise which might cause us to be separated."

"I will not say I thank you for such a wish, my dear Helen, because I believe we are on both sides too thoroughly convinced that we all mutually love each other for it to be necessary for either party to return thanks for a proof of it. But, on the contrary, I must reproach you with a want of judgment, Helen, and a deficiency of common sense, that rather surprises me."

"Yes, yes! I see it all!" exclaimed Helen, quickly, and colouring more vividly than before. "You are quite right, and I was

quite wrong. Forgive me, uncle Rixley ! It was a blunder, and I beg your pardon for my want of thoughtfulness. You shall pay each of you, if you approve it, at the rate of one hundred a-year ; and the pony that you ride, and that Henry rides when he is at home, shall be kept entirely at your expense, if you approve it."

Mr. Rixley paused for a little while before he answered, and then he said, "That will be leaving me a very rich man, Helen. However, so let it be. We must all look forward to the time, probably at no very distant date, when you will have a partner to assist you in the disposal of your superfluous wealth ; and, meanwhile, I consent to the terms you have dictated, because I feel quite certain that no way of spending your present income would give you more pleasure."

This was the last financial conversation which ever took place between the uncle and niece, as long as the young lady continued a minor ; one reason for which was, that it would have been extremely difficult for either party to have found anything very interesting to say on the subject to the other. It

was, indeed, impossible that any housekeeping, on any scale, could have gone on with more satisfactory regularity: no one ever heard of any bills; no people were ever served by more obsequious tradesmen. The servants were alert, obedient, and attentive; and the whole establishment went on with the regularity of a well-ordered machine, the springs of which were both out of sight and out of hearing.

But with all this excellent good management, the enlarged hospitalities of Beauchamp Park did not display themselves with quite as much splendour as the Rixley family had expected. Whether this was, or was not, a disappointment to the gay-hearted Anne may be doubtful; but to her father and mother it unquestionably came in the shape of a very agreeable surprise. They had now been domesticated with Helen for some years, and they had become sufficiently acquainted with her character during that time to have convinced themselves that she was a girl of no ordinary ability; but, nevertheless, they were very far from understanding the peculiarities of her disposition.

They had by no means suspected her of being likely to fall into any very objectionable expenses for the sake of indulging a taste for dissipation, or a taste for parade ; but they certainly did think that her anxiety to become the mistress of her own house arose from a wish to receive more company, and accept more invitations, than her careful guardian had hitherto thought it prudent to do.

But they speedily found that they were mistaken, and that her proceedings had much more the appearance of increased economy than of increased extravagance. This increased economy, however, was not displayed in any branch of expenditure which could affect the comfort of the family or of the household ; in all such respects her only object seemed to be to follow scrupulously the example which her aunt had set her.

But Helen was vastly more enterprising and speculative than they suspected in her management of the acres reserved as the home farm, and which consisted of some rich and highly-conditioned pastures, besides the park, which surrounded the house, and

which park, almost from time immemorial, as her grey-headed bailiff assured her, had been kept pretty nearly sacred to the fine herd of deer for which it was celebrated. This grey-headed bailiff had held his office too long to be dismissed without reluctance, and too long to be retained with utility. But Helen found means to settle this difficulty greatly to the satisfaction, as well as to the benefit, of all parties, for she settled the pretty cottage, in which he and his old wife had long resided, upon them as long as both or either should live, together with an annuity equal in amount to his yearly wages; and then she dismissed him with no more harshness than was contained in the observation that he had worked long enough to deserve a comfortable provision without working any more.

This arrangement was really too reasonable not to be approved of by all parties; but when it was followed by the announcement that the deer were to be sold, and the land let for grazing, a vast variety of observations followed: and, moreover, the promptitude with which this measure was carried into

effect, caused a good many people to suspect that either the young heiress herself, or some of her friends for her, were determined to turn the place to profit.

But all this was done with such a systematic avoidance of discussion about it on the part of Helen, that, notwithstanding the very delightful and very perfect harmony which existed between them all, there was not any one of the Rixley family who had any knowledge of what her motive could be for robbing the place both of dignity and beauty, and that for the sake of gaining money, which it was very evident she could not want, and which it was very evident she did not spend.

It was, however, almost impossible for the Rixley family not to suppose, however little their previous knowledge of her had led to such a conclusion, that Helen was avaricious; and they certainly did suppose it, though there was so much in her general conduct and apparent disposition to make them think otherwise. But facts, as we all know, are stubborn things; and unquestionably there were many facts which led to this conclusion.

In the first place, her wish to become her own housekeeper showed a decided inclination to obtain the control of money; and although at first it might have been supposed that this wish was created rather by the desire of spending money than of saving it, the results showed very clearly that this was not the case. It is true, indeed, that she contrived, somehow or other, that they should mix more freely with the neighbours, whose society they really liked, than they had ever done before; but this was not achieved by means of giving costly entertainments; for although Helen very frequently invited two or three favourite neighbours to dine with her, nearly a year had elapsed since she had become mistress of her house, without her ever having received what among country neighbours is called a 'dinner party.'

There was another symptom of Helen's dislike to costly expenditure in her dress. Upon their first taking up their abode at the Park, it had been agreed between Mr. Rixley and his wife that Helen should receive a yearly stipend of one hundred pounds for her dress. She had appeared somewhat

startled at the large amount ; however, she made no objection to receiving it, but, on the contrary, seemed to enjoy the power it gave her of buying pretty things exceedingly. Moreover, it very rarely happened that she bought one pretty thing without buying two, for it was only by this contrivance that she could make her friend Anne look as smart as herself—a point upon which she appeared at that time to be very particular.

But all this was altered now ; she very rarely gave her cousin Anne anything that was much worth having ; and as to her own dress, if it had not been that the marked simplicity of her attire seemed to become her so particularly that she might have been suspected of coquetry for adopting it, she might have been said to be the most economically dressed heiress in the world.

There was yet another point upon which her tender care of money became evident, exactly at the time when she first began to have considerable power over that variously valued article. When Helen first took up her residence at Beauchamp Park, there was no feature in her new neighbourhood which

seemed to inspire her with so much interest as the condition of the poor, and often did she deny to herself, and perhaps to Anne too, the indulgence of a new bonnet, in order to purchase a new blanket for a poor neighbour.

Now, although this had never been done ostentatiously, it had never been done mysteriously, and every body therefore said that "pretty Miss Beauchamp seemed likely to be very free with her money," but nobody could say this any longer now; for pretty Miss Beauchamp, very decidedly, was not free with her money. Yet nevertheless she could never be said either to forget her poor neighbours; on the contrary, she seemed to keep them in her memory in a way which was too constant, and too resolutely active, to be at all agreeable to her servants.

Her alms, before she became her own housekeeper, had consisted chiefly of donations from her own private purse; but now the privy purse was spared, and the hungry part of the village population were invited to appear in the servants' hall twice a-week, where she very punctually gave them the

meeting, and presented them such a proportion of well-prepared soup, or well-preserved fragments, as might be spared without any sin against economy.

Now certainly all this did look as if the heiress was learning to love money, and this love of money is not a species of affection which is contemplated with any very tender feelings by lookers on, even when they feel within themselves something like sympathy with it.

But, somehow or other, Helen, though she used but little caution in the manifestation of this weakness, seemed to escape the feeling of dislike which it generally inspires; for, to say the truth, nobody seemed to dislike her, notwithstanding her peculiarities; and considering the limited number of her acquaintance, a good many people really appeared to be very fond of her.

As to her own relations they were probably partial, for notwithstanding their having such excellent opportunities for seeing all her faults, it would have been difficult to make any one of them confess that she had any.

Neither did her 'standing' in the neighbourhood appear to suffer in any important degree from her pertinacious averseness to dinner parties, handsome carriages, fine dresses, or stately deer.

The intercourse between the Beauchamp Park and the Harrington families had become not only frequent, but intimate in no common degree; for the elders of the two houses suited each other particularly well, and the two young ladies at Beauchamp Park, and the two young ladies at The Oaks (the residence of Mr. Harrington), might almost have been quoted as two pair of double cherries, so closely affectionate was the union between them.

Nor were these the only neighbours with whom the Rixley family, and Helen, had contracted a degree of intimacy which had ripened into friendship. Sir William and Lady Knighton, who lived at the distance only of a mile from the park gates, though not in the same parish, together with their numerous progeny, were among those who lived with them on terms more resembling a friendship of long standing than an almost

new acquaintance ; moreover, there was a rather antiquated bachelor of the name of Phelps, who was nearer to them still, and who from various causes, one doubtless being the convenient vicinity of his residence, was more frequently a guest at the Park than any other individual.

No great dinners, nor costly receptions of any kind, were found necessary to keep up a constant intercourse between these friendly neighbours ; and the Beauchamp Park family were, for the present, perfectly well contented without extending their intimacies any further.

It may seem, perhaps, a little strange, but so it was, that of all these intimacies, notwithstanding my double-cherry simile, the most intimate was that which existed between old Mr. Phelps and my young heroine. How this came to pass it might be tedious to relate in detail, for the circumstances which led to it were very trivial. Mr. Phelps dined exactly at the same rather early hour as the family at the Park, and during the fair weather months of the year this led to a long afternoon walk, or a long afternoon

lounge on the garden seats of the Beauchamp shrubberies, for those who had nothing else to do that they liked better.

Now Mr. Rixley liked an after dinner nap better; and Mrs. Rixley had for years set this portion of her existence apart (when not very particularly engaged) to the reading a daily newspaper.

Anne Rixley, though not a distinguished musician by nature, was greatly desirous to become one by practice, and this was the interval which, whenever it was in her power, she liked to devote to this object; and thus Helen was left at perfect liberty to dispose of herself as she liked, a privilege which she valued greatly, and that she did so value it was not a secret to any body.

Many of these precious hours were spent, as may easily be imagined, in reading; for much of Helen's very miscellaneous reading was of a kind that could best be enjoyed alone. During the short days of the year this luxury was indulged in within the shelter of her own dressing-room; but in the longer and warmer days of the year her study was chosen from among the quietest

and prettiest retreats of her ample gardens.

It was once, twice, and again, that while thus enjoying herself, her greatly valued old neighbour, Mr. Phelps, had found her out, and very decidedly disturbed her in her favourite occupation. And for the once or twice, perhaps, she was not only disturbed, but in a small degree vexed at the interruption; for she had loved to think herself alone, when she looked round upon the fair and tranquil spot she had chosen, and as quite beyond the reach of interruption.

Fortunately for her, however, her temper was too sweet, and her manner too gentle, for the intruder to discover that she was annoyed by his approach, and therefore the third time came. And then their conversation began by the seemingly common-place question, "What are you reading?"

But her answer did more towards converting them from neighbours into friends than it was probable any other answer of the same length could have done, and yet it only consisted in her telling him the title of the book she held in her hand. The book

was a newly-published work on electricity, and its probable influence in many cases where no such influence is suspected.

Now in these blessed latter days there is nothing very extraordinary in a young girl getting hold of a book upon electricity, and reading it ; so it could not be this fact which so much struck Mr. Phelps. The fact that did strike him was, that in all his pleasant intimate intercourse with the family at the Park, he had never heard a single word drop from Mr. Rixley, or from any member of the family, which had led him to guess that natural science was among the subjects to which their reading hours were devoted.

And this remark was neither hastily made, nor ill-founded. Mr. Rixley was not only an accomplished classical scholar, he was also a deeply-read historian ; but accident, or inclination, or both, had led him, throughout his life much more to literature than to science ; and the consequence of this naturally was that his family also were more literary than scientific.

Exactly the contrary of this was the case with Mr. Bolton ; and, as great part of

Helen's education, such as it was, had been received from him, it naturally followed that she had, in some degree, acquired his opinions respecting what is the most interesting occupation for the human intellect.

But she had sufficient quickness to perceive that her ideas on this subject differed essentially from those of her uncle and his family, and sufficient tact not to obtrude her love for scientific nibbling upon those who had no appetite for it; a sort of forbearance which it was the more easy for her to practise, because she had vastly more sympathy with their favourite studies than they had with hers.

With her new old friend, Mr. Phelps, the case was very similar. He half worshipped, half idolized, good poetry, as a sort of inspiration that was 'light from Heaven;' but he dived and delved into the depths of science with the devoted and the hopeful industry of an Australian digger; feeling deeply convinced the while, that if any means exists by which man can improve his condition here below, or learn to guess what might await him in ages yet to come, we

must look for them in the direction of natural science.

Now Mr. Phelps, being one of the most kind-hearted and social-tempered old bachelors in the world, had thought himself exceedingly fortunate in the acquisition of such very near, and such very agreeable neighbours as those at Beauchamp Park. The absence of all pretence and affectation among them delighted him, and he was much too wise a man to run the risk of weakening the cordial liking which so evidently existed between them, by endeavouring to lead the conversation to subjects which it was evident to him could not be interesting to them.

But, nevertheless, he would have dearly liked to cultivate a taste for his own favourite pursuits among them, could he have discerned the least germ of inclination for it in any of them.

The hope of this, however, he had long abandoned ; for the only one of the party to whom nature had given a propensity to peep into her mysteries was one of the last in the world to obtrude her own speculations upon

companions whose speculations were evidently directed elsewhere.

But this little adventure of the title-page led to sundry discoveries, that were exceedingly interesting to both the parties concerned in it; and it required a wonderfully short time to establish between the old gentleman and the young lady a sort of sympathetic cordiality, which soon ripened into a friendship that truly deserved the epithet of confidential; and the consequence of this was, that poor Helen soon found herself pouring out all the secrets of her heart to old Mr. Phelps, with a degree of *abandon* greater than she had ever indulged in, since she had lost the companionship of her brother.

There were, doubtless, other reasons for this, besides the fact that they both loved to talk, and to think, of things in Heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and amongst these other reasons may be counted the fact, that the subject upon which her heart was most deeply interested, namely, the fate of her brother, and all the mysteries concerning him, was one upon

which, for a multitude of reasons, she never could converse freely, either with her uncle or any of his family.

All this, however, was arrived at with a little less rapidity than I have used in recounting it; but the friendship of Mr. Phelps was so soon to be resorted to by Helen, in an affair in which the most confidential secrecy was required, that it was necessary to explain to the reader how it came to pass that such a feeling had so speedily been brought into existence between my young heroine and her aged neighbour.

CHAPTER XII.

HENRY RIXLEY, though probably without any very sanguine hope of an ultimate change in his destiny, had eagerly welcomed the temporary relief afforded by following his friend Helen's advice to delay the ceremony of ordination as long as possible.

The taking any step that led irretrievably towards his devoting himself to a profession for which he felt himself both unfitted and disinclined was terrible to him.

There was so much of genuine truth, and of sound common sense, in the judgment which he thus passed upon himself, that Helen, who was the only member of his own family to whom he had opened his heart on the subject, felt no scruples of conscience in

continuing her counsel in favour of delay ; but it would have been difficult for Henry to have persevered in it, without at once confessing his own hope of ultimate escape from what he so greatly wished to avoid, had it not been for the lucky accident of his having been proposed by his tutor as the travelling companion of a young man of high rank, who had, like Henry himself, just taken a very respectable degree.

This well-timed proposal was, in every respect, too advantageous to be declined, and the plotting cousins were, for the present at least, very pleasantly relieved from the painful task of endeavouring to avoid an event which was pressing onwards towards them too rapidly for any very reasonable hope that temporary delay might enable them to escape it.

But now, everything seemed going on well. Very few young ladies under eighteen have ever suffered more from anxiety to achieve an important piece of business, in which love had no concern, than Helen had done, in order to discover some means of saving her cousin Henry from a destiny

which he dreaded, and which, she was fully persuaded, would never have threatened him, had she herself never been born !

This, certainly, was a painful situation, and it was made more so by her conviction—and a very well-founded conviction it was—that no argument which it was in her power to use would induce her uncle to consent to her pledging herself to purchase a commission for her cousin, as soon as she should come of age.

It was under these circumstances that she had asked for an increase of income, and for permission to regulate the expenditure of it herself; and it was with the very sanguine, but not very reasonable hope of being able to save from this income the sum necessary to the purchase of a commission for him, that the young heiress made her *debût* as a housekeeper with such extreme economy.

It can hardly be said that she was disappointed at the result of her economical contrivances; for, what with the profits of her careful farming, together with the fruits of her strict economy, she found herself in possession of a sum that almost startled her by

the largeness of its amount; but yet it was not enough; for Henry had despairingly told her what the price of a desirable commission would be, and the time now peremptorily fixed by his father for his ordination was drawing very near, and she was on the very eve of proposing to him that an *undesirable* commission should be bought, rather than that he should take the irrevocable step, when all her anxieties were suddenly brought to a most happy conclusion by the appointment of her delighted cousin as a travelling tutor.

The news of this appointment was very joyfully hailed by the whole family, but not either of them had the least idea how very much the joy of Helen exceeded theirs: had they guessed it, they would probably have guessed also that some very tender sentiment must have been at work within her to cause such strong emotion; but, if they had, their guessing then would have been most egregiously wrong, for the feelings and anxieties of the young Helen concerning her cousin Henry were infinitely more like those of an affectionate mother than of an ena-

moured maid ; and so full was her heart of the joy which this appointment occasioned her, that she at length indulged herself, by confiding the weighty secret of all her plots and plans to Mr. Phelps.

“ And why did you not tell me all this before ? ” said the old gentleman, who perfectly well knew that he was more in her confidence than any other person.

“ Because I knew that if I did tell, you would offer to help me with money,” replied Helen, with unflinching sincerity.

“ And if I had done so, Miss Nelly,” replied the old man, looking reproachfully at her, “ what harm would it have done you ? ”

“ The very great harm of obliging me to refuse an offered kindness from you,” she replied.

“ And wherefore should you have thought it necessary to refuse such an accommodation from me ? ” returned Mr. Phelps, somewhat sternly.

“ Because I feel that in requesting permission, as I have done, to take into my own young hands the management of the

money allowed for my maintenance, and for the keeping in proper order the house and grounds where we are permitted to reside, I have pledged myself to my most dear and confiding uncle to act with the most careful discretion, and to the very best of my poor judgment, so as to prevent his ever having cause to repent the confidence he has placed in me."

"Perfectly right, Miss Beauchamp! I doubt if any minor could have answered more discreetly. But I must beg you to answer another question. Why should my being permitted to assist you in a very praiseworthy object be considered by you as objectionable?" returned Mr. Phelps.

"It would have appeared objectionable to me," replied Helen, demurely, "because my borrowing money from a neighbour, before I could legally give any security for the repayment of it, even though it was for the purpose of buying a commission for a young gentleman, would not, according to the best of my poor judgment, have been acting with careful discretion."

Mr. Phelps could not conceal a smile, but

he held up a threatening finger, and he shook his head.

“Mark my words, Helen Beauchamp!” said he, “if you turn out a lawyer upon my hands, it is not your boasting the dignity of the gown, or the coif either, that shall prevent my giving you up altogether. A pretty account I should have to give of myself did I, like other great men, keep a conscientiously true diary of my thoughts, and feelings! After making a touching statement of my joy and thankfulness at having found an unsophisticated young mind, full of energy and industry in the pursuit of the stupendously vast—and stupendously minute—truths of nature, I must go on to tell that the said young mind had, nevertheless, a deplorable propensity towards special pleading! Fie upon you, Helen! Fie upon you for having thought all those business-like thoughts and then acting upon them!”

“And in my private diary,” replied Helen, “I should have to confess, that upon one occasion, when I thought I had found the most devoted lover of truth in the world, I subsequently discovered that the most strik-

ing feature in this candid individual, was a tyrannical love of scolding, which led him to find fault with people, even when he knew they were perfectly right. No doubt of it, Mr. Phelps, we are both of us *very* obstinate tempers: so I think, that for the preservation of our friendship, which is really very pleasant, the best plan will be for us to agree to differ now and then, without quarrelling about it."

"Well! Miss Nelly! I believe you are right, so let us shake hands, and agree to endure each other as long as we can."

The compact thus entered into was a lasting one, and one effect of it was that Mr. Phelps was very soon in possession of all Helen's secrets; and the comfort and relief she found from being able to express, at last, with perfect unreserve, all her love, all her fears, and all her regrets about her brother, were very great. She had the certainty too that she was not giving pain to the patient listener, to whom she now, for the first time, described all the fine qualities of her brother, just as they appeared to her, and most assuredly the portrait she drew of him was one

well calculated to create a very strong interest for him in the heart of such a man as Mr. Phelps.

There was one, and only one secret which she did not reveal to him. She did not tell him that there were moments when, remembering the warm, the vehement, the ardent, temper of her brother, together with the fearful treatment which he had received, —she did not tell Mr. Phelps that there were dreadful moments, both by day and night, during which the horrible idea that he might have been guilty of his father's death recurred to her!

And Helen was very wise in this, for herein Mr. Phelps could have brought her neither help nor comfort. It would have been much more easy for her to have imparted the vague suspicion which so often tormented her existence, than to have infused into the mind of her old friend the species of antidote which was always, more or less, producing a neutralizing effect on her own heart, either in the shape of doubt of the fact itself, or of a feeling which she would not have recognised as justification, but

which was somewhat allied to it, and which arose as she recalled the scene (never forgotten) in which he had proclaimed to the boy the infamy of the mother whose memory he so wished to reverence.

As to the other mystery which attached to Helen, namely, that of having a fondly remembered, and devoted old servant, who, for some reason or other, kept herself too completely concealed for it to be possible for any inquiry to discover her retreat, she said nothing to her friend, Mr. Phelps; for she felt that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to make him understand how well she deserved the tender recollection she cherished of her, while appearing so completely to forget her existence. As to the real explanation of this mystery it was not in Helen's power to give it, for she was herself as ignorant of it, as it was possible Mr. Phelps could be.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE economy of our young housekeeper was suffered to relax a little after her cousin's appointment was finally settled, and, by gentle degrees, she began to see a good deal more of her neighbours. This was not done however without a good deal of prudent forethought, Mr. Phelps quietly assisting her in all her schemes, though keeping himself as completely out of sight, and as carefully, as if their plottings together were for the purpose of effecting some treason against the state.

But the old gentleman plainly perceived, that with all her lawyer-like cleverness, she could not easily attain the object she had in view without assistance ; and that assistance

he determined to give her, though not at the cost of being, or seeming to be a meddling busybody, which would in truth have been acting a part very particularly foreign to his nature. But, between them, they managed too well for there to be any danger of this, and her excellent uncle, his admirable wife, and amiable daughter, had no more suspicion that their well-beloved Helen was every now and then buying a little three per cent. consol-stock in the name of her cousin Henry Rixley, than that when she set out upon one of her *tête-à-tête* rambles with old Mr. Phelps, she discoursed with him on subjects which led them to discuss a good many of those recondite things in heaven and earth, which, as Hamlet very justly observed to his friend Horatio, were not dreamed of in their philosophy. But, nevertheless, notwithstanding all this very decided eccentricity on the part of my heroine, her neighbours seemed to take very kindly to her, and to welcome her progressive steps towards majority, and party-giving, with great satisfaction.

This increased sociability did not however bring the family at Beauchamp Park into

intimacy with any neighbours likely to rival their friends the Harringtons in their affection; and by gentle degrees it certainly became evident that the heir of Speedhurst Abbey was not the individual of that family who was the least likely to declare that Helen Beauchamp was 'made up of every creature's best.'

The person who first discovered this was his sister Agnes, and as her opinion of Helen, allowing for the natural difference between a young gentleman and a young lady on such a subject, was in very excellent sympathy with his own, she watched all the symptoms of his rapidly growing attachment with very great satisfaction.

But she thought her own satisfaction in contemplating the probable result of this, would be infinitely greater still could she bring him honestly to confess the fact that he was in love, and in order to procure herself this greatly desired satisfaction, she determined to invite him to a *tête-à-tête* ramble in search of a wild flower, indigenous to the neighbourhood, which she wished to transplant into her garden, and in the course

of such an expedition she thought she might easily lead the conversation in such a direction as would produce the result she desired.

Nothing could be more easy than to obtain the companionship of her brother upon such an expedition ; for he, too, was a gardener, and loved to make experiments.

Their talk, as they set forth, was on the marvellous effects of culture, and of the power granted to man not only of using, but of improving the natural productions with which we are so liberally surrounded.

“I often think,” said George Harrington, “when I watch, year after year, the improvements, nay even the variations which it is in the power of art to produce on vegetation, that we are not yet aware of all the power that has been bestowed upon us, or at any rate that we do not use it.”

“Quite true!” replied his sister. “Your gardener at Speedhurst has shewn me flowers in the conservatory there that were as unlike any I ever saw before as if they were new creations. And yet they were all old acquaintances that had been subjected to a little clever discipline.”

“Does it never come into your head, Agnes,” returned her brother, “that if we took as much pains with education, and ventured to be as experimental, we might do a good deal towards eradicating some of our worst failings? It would be a good thing, wouldn’t it, if we could weed out original sin?”

“Doubtless, but I suspect that we have no such power,” replied Agnes. “It would be like attempting to revise creation, and improve the work by our contrivances.”

“Not more so than when we graft a peach upon an almond, or a pippin upon a crab,” returned George.

“I have often thought,” he continued, that the very puzzling question about the origin of evil might be solved by my theory. The labours of the human brain, and their effect upon the condition of man, are becoming more stupendous every day, and it would be an impious, as well as a bold man, who should fix a limit to them. It would have appeared quite as absurd a hundred years ago to talk of sending a message under the water from Dover to Calais, as it does now

to talk of finding out a way of making human beings understand that it would be more for their interest, and gratification also, to do what was right, than to do what was wrong."

"When you contrive to do that, brother George," replied Agnes laughing, "I shall be quite ready to allow that we may toll the knell over original sin." And having said this she skipped off to climb the bank under which they were walking, apparently for the purpose of examining some plants growing on it, but in reality for the more important purpose of putting an end to her brother's discussion; for if she let him pursue the speculation upon which he was entering, she saw but little chance of her discovering before they got home again whether he were in love with Helen Beauchamp or not.

After lingering therefore for a minute or two among the brambles and weeds amidst which she had placed herself, she returned to the path by another active spring, and passing her arm under that of her brother she contrived cleverly enough to open the theme on which she was intent, without appearing

too suddenly to abandon that which had occupied them before, by saying, "You never will persuade me George that any power but that of God direct, could make such a faultless creature as my friend Helen Beauchamp. Education has had very little to do, I think, in making her what she is."

The name of Helen Beauchamp being at that moment perfectly unexpected, it made the young man start so vehemently that Agnes felt as if the question she was so anxious to ask, was already answered. And this was fortunate, for it did not appear that she was likely to get any other answer, for they walked on for several minutes in very perfect silence. But Agnes was not quite satisfied, and renewed the attack by saying, "Why do you not answer me, George? Do you think that education could have made Helen what she is? I don't mean in beauty, but in intellect."

"I hardly remember what I said, Agnes," he replied, gravely; "I was half jesting, I believe; but if you must have a serious answer to your strange question I must certainly confess then in the instance you

have named, Nature has had more to do than education."

"I thought you could not deny that," rejoined his sister; "Helen is an extraordinary sort of girl, isn't she?"

"Yes, very," he replied, and again became silent.

"How can you be so very disagreeable, George?" said his sister. "You must know how very much I love and admire her, and unless you have some particularly good reason for it, I really think it rather unkind that you will not indulge me by hearing you talk a little about her. You must know perfectly well that your opinion has great weight with me, and I should not wish to select any one as my particular friend of whom you had not a good opinion."

"I have not at all a bad opinion of Miss Beauchamp," replied the young man, thrusting his hand into his coat pocket, and drawing forth his pocket handkerchief, in consequence of which manœuvre his sister's arm which rested upon his, fell unsupported by her side.

"A bad opinion! You have not at all a

bad opinion of Helen Beauchamp !” repeated Agnes very slowly.

“It is impossible to misunderstand such a phrase as that, George !” she added, after the pause of a moment, “and I am very glad that we have had this conversation together before I put in practice the thousand and one little schemes which I had in my head for enabling us to see a great deal more of her. As to your having a bad opinion of her, I should not suppose there was much chance of that, because it would be so difficult to fix upon any thing in her upon which a bad opinion could be founded, and you are not a person to found either a bad or a good opinion upon nothing. But that may not be enough to prevent your disliking her. Liking and disliking are almost always involuntary, I believe, and have very little to do with the judgment.”

“And what have I said, Agnes, to make you suppose I dislike her ?” said her brother, speaking as distinctly as the necessity of blowing his nose enabled him to do.

“Oh, quite enough,” she replied, rather petulantly. “However it is quite right that

you should make yourself understood, because Heaven knows that we have not too much of your company as it is, and I suppose we should have less still if we were to gratify our own predilections by perpetually bringing into your society a person you do not like. Jane likes Helen Beauchamp quite as well as I do, but you may depend upon it, dear George, we will neither of us indulge our liking at your expense. You shall not be bored, when you are with us, by meeting our favourites, instead of your own."

The wily young lady's device answered perfectly. This promise of clearing the premises from the approach of Miss Beauchamp, for the especial purpose of gratifying him, was more than he could stand, and his next speech, beginning with, "Oh Agnes, Agnes! how can you torture me so!" was not brought to a conclusion till the well pleased sister had received the agreeable assurance that if he did not marry Helen Beauchamp, he should never marry at all.

The rest of their walk was exceedingly agreeable to them both, for their conversation was wholly and solely on the subject of

Helen, her perfections, and their hopes; these delightful hopes, being uttered with very comfortable confidence by the sister, and with graceful diffidence by the brother, sufficed to make them utterly forget the flight of time, nor might they have either of them recollected such grovelling occupations as dining and dressing, had not the warning note of Helen's own sonorous turret clock given them a hint that they had better turn round and walk home.

"I wish," said George Harrington, as he threw a tender glance towards the splendid abode of his beloved, "I wish that Helen was not such a rich heiress. Girls with small portions, or with none at all, must look upon a declaration of love, and an offer of marriage, in a very different light from an heiress. There is no great compliment in a man's expressing a wish to marry a girl possessed of a magnificent mansion, and lots of thousands a year—is there, Agnes?"

"When a poor man expresses such a wish I grant that your observation may have some weight," she replied, "nay, so

truly do I think so, that if you were a poor man, George, instead of a rich one, I should not desire to see this marriage take place as ardently as I do now."

"I truly believe it, Agnes," said he. "But cannot you fancy," he added, musingly, "how much more delightful it would be for me to propose to Helen if she had not a farthing? She could not doubt the sincerity of my love then, you know."

"Nor is she at all more likely to doubt it now," said his sister. "The owner of Speedhurst Abbey and its acres, is as little likely to sell himself to a wife he does not like as a rich girl is likely to accept him if he is disagreeable to her. In a well-assorted marriage, brother George, a tolerable equality of condition precludes the fear of interested motives on either side."

"True, dearest! most true!" he gaily replied. "I should be sorry to spend my good uncle's property in the purchase of a wife, so if I get her, my Agnes, I will promise to take the good the gods provide without grumbling."

But although George Harrington had

thus candidly confessed his tender passion to his sister Agnes, it was still some months before he ventured to confess it to the fair Helen herself. She was still very young, too young for it to be right for him to make her a proposal, without having first obtained her uncle's permission to do so; and George Harrington preferred waiting and watching with doubtful joy for occasional symptoms of partiality on her part, to the offering her his hand with the formal sanction of her guardian, which at her age would seem almost like a command to her to accept it. Moreover, as yet, George Harrington had no home of his own to offer her, and though nothing could be more convenient and proper than that if he married a woman who was mistress of a splendid residence, he should occupy it till he was in possession of his own, he still felt a repugnance to asking for the immediate use of her property while she was still so young as to render her granting it more the act of her guardian than of herself.

Meanwhile, the hours and days they passed together were becoming more and

more delightful to them both, and not even the lover himself could feel an interval to be long which was passed with so much hopeful happiness.

During the whole of this time, however, it must be remembered that Miss Beauchamp had received no offer of marriage from Mr. George Harrington. But she was in no way surprised at this; she felt very perfectly sure that he was not only devotedly attached to her, but also that it was his intention to offer her his hand as soon as he considered her old enough to become his wife. And most thankful and happy did she feel, as she silently meditated on the destiny which awaited her.

It is certain that the early years of Helen had passed in a manner to make her prematurely thoughtful, and it was with no light childish transitory feeling that she contemplated the happy prospects which now seemed opening before her.

She still clung with devoted love and admiration to the remembrance of what her brother was, before the last dreadful scene which preceded her father's death; but even

while in the very act of recalling all the high ability and all the noble qualities he had manifested before the atrocious conduct and base reproaches of his father had lashed him into the terrible state of mind which she had witnessed, even while thinking of all he had been to her then, she could not help feeling conscious that the dreadful manner in which they had been separated formed an epoch in her early history which it would be painful to relate to George Harrington.

Nevertheless, she was fully determined that nothing should be concealed from him, and that she never would become his wife till every particular of her early position, so widely different from that in which he now saw her, should have been made known to him.

It would have been a pleasure, or at least a comfort, to Helen, could this disclosure have been made immediately; but she fancied that her volunteering this confidential narrative, before he had given her any positive right to believe that it was her duty to make it, would be exactly the reverse of the line of conduct which she

wished to pursue towards him ; for it would at once show him that she considered him as her future husband, though he had never yet formally declared his hope of being so.

She might have spared herself a good deal of suffering had she decided otherwise.

CHAPTER XIV.

It chanced one fine summer evening, when Helen, her friend Agnes, and young Harrington were sitting together on a garden bench in Mr. Harrington's garden, that Agnes took it into her head to amuse herself by relating to Helen the conversation, or rather a part of the conversation, which she had held with her brother about a year before concerning the great drawback which a large fortune, on the part of a young lady, offered to the perfect happiness of a love match.

"In what way?" demanded Helen, slightly colouring.

"Oh! for a deeply romantic reason," replied her friend. "George says," con-

tinued Agnes, "that no man who falls in love with a girl of large fortune can ever have the delight of proving to her beyond the reach of doubt that he loves her for herself alone."

"I do not agree with him," said Helen. "If indeed the lover were in a station of life so much below that of his beloved as to render a marriage between them incongruous, or in any way degrading to the lady, I should then think that the best and most honourable thing he could do would be to conquer his tender passion as speedily as possible, for I do not think that persons in different situations of life, or disproportioned and ill-matched in any way, are at all likely to do well together as man and wife."

"You are wrong, fair lady! You are wrong!" returned George, very earnestly. "I can conceive nothing on earth so delightful—so perfectly enviable—as the situation of a young man possessed of a large fortune, falling in love with an adorable girl who has none. There must be something so very delightful in giving this unquestionable

proof of love—this indisputable assurance that she is dearer than all the world beside! I can imagine no happiness superior to that. No man asking a rich woman to marry him can feel it!”

“Oh yes! I comprehend you perfectly,” returned Helen, the ‘celestial rosy red’ still deepening on her cheek. “It is clear that you are longing to enact the classic drama of the king and the beggar girl, or the dairy-maid, or whatever she was. But I think your theory very unphilosophical, Mr. Harrington. There is more of discord than of harmony in your notion.”

“You would not say so if you perfectly understood me, Miss Beauchamp,” returned George, eagerly. “My portionless angel may have all the advantages your imagination can heap upon her, save money. So far am I, indeed, from differing from you as to the absolute necessity that there should be no striking incongruity of position in marriage, that I don’t believe there is a man in the world who would shrink from forming a really unsuitable connexion more than I should do. I would far rather remain

single all my life than give my children a mother who should in any way disgrace them. My theory, Miss Beauchamp, about wishing for poverty in a wife may, perhaps, have something fanciful in it, and I certainly can imagine the possibility of my getting over it. But Heaven keep me from falling in love with a woman who should bring dishonour with her. I really believe that if I were the hero of a romance, having a discovery of that sort as its catastrophe, I should lose my senses.” -

This tirade being uttered to the lineal descendant of the fine old race of Beauchamps, and the heir of its wide-spreading acres, as well as of its ancient name, was uttered as fearlessly, as it was vehemently ; and when Helen got up and walked away with the air of a person who had listened to a discussion till it had become wearisome, he might, perhaps, feel a little vexed at himself for riding one of his hobbies to death ; but he little guessed that he had sent a poisoned arrow to the heart of one, whom he would have died to protect from injury.

And yet a poisoned arrow could scarcely have given a sharper pang to the heart of the unfortunate Helen than the words he had spoken.

That the brother she so dearly loved was the offspring of shame, would have, of itself, sufficed to make the words she had listened to, sound like a note of warning, giving her notice to beware before she permitted herself to love too well one who might shrink from all affinity with the being who, with the exception of her mother, she had hitherto loved better than any other in the world. But alas ! this was not all. Perhaps it was now, as she hung over a rose-bush, appearing to admire its redundant blossoms, that Helen felt, for the first time, ALL the horror of believing it *possible* that this dear—this most fondly-loved—brother had been guilty of a crime more terrible, if it were possible, than that of the first murder.

Poor George Harrington, blushing like a school-boy at the idea of having wearied his lady love by his prosing, approached her, laughingly, and seizing playfully upon her hand, which she had extended as if to gather

a flower, he exclaimed, "No Helen! no! *Point de rose sans épines*; that is an established fact, we all know. But you have already had your share of *épines* while listening to my confession of faith about matrimony, and now you shall have a rose without any. All the other thorns shall be for me."

And so saying, he gathered one or two of the very loveliest buds he could find, and having at the imminent risk of excoriating his fingers, run them resolutely up and down every stem, he presented them to her.

She received them mechanically, and mechanically too turned towards him as she did so.

Helen was not aware of the ghastly paleness of her own cheek as she did this, but the sudden start he gave, and the frightened expression of his eye as he looked at her, made her at once feel conscious that her looks were betraying a portion of the misery she was feeling at her heart.

"Helen! you are suffering! you are ill!" he exclaimed in an agony of alarm. "You must sit down, Helen. You must let me

place you on the sofa. And without waiting for an answer, which in truth she was in no state to give, he threw his arm round her and almost carried her through the open window by which they had passed from the drawing-room to the lawn.

Agnes, who had remained sitting on the garden bench when the unfortunate conversation had begun, plainly perceiving that her brother was supporting Helen in a manner which he would not have done had she been able to support herself, rushed into the room after them, and was as much shocked as surprised at finding her friend alarmingly pale, and evidently suffering, though protesting in a not very audible voice, that she was now quite well again.

“No, Helen! you are not well,” exclaimed Agnes, as she pressed the clay-cold hand of her friend. “And yet a few, a very few minutes ago I thought I had never seen you looking so well. You must have been very near fainting, dearest, or you could not have looked so ghastly pale as you did when I entered the room. Are you subject to fainting, Helen? You never told me of it.”

“No, no, I am not subject to it,” replied Helen, attempting to smile, “but I certainly did feel very unwell just now. It is quite gone off, however, and I shall be perfectly well when I get into the open carriage again, for my drive home. Will you have the kindness to order it for me?”

“What! won’t you stay till the evening with us, Helen, as you promised?” said her friend Agnes, looking greatly disappointed. “Oh! I had so much to say to you, and about such a multitude of things! Why should you not stay and get well here, dearest?”

“Oblige me, my dearest Agnes,” said Helen, languidly. “I know so perfectly well how to manage my little nervous infirmities! I had a very bad nervous fever once, and though I have been getting better and stronger every year since I came to the Park, I am not yet quite so strong a person as I hope to be when I am older. But you must trust me to my own management, Agnes. And if you will come and see me to-morrow, you may depend upon it you will find me quite well.”

George Harrington had stood anxiously looking at her while this discussion was taking place, and notwithstanding her pallid cheek and shaking hand, he felt strongly tempted to think that the malady which had seized upon her, was not caused by any physical ailment, but was the result of some painful feeling occasioned by the conversation in which they had been engaged.

It might be difficult to say whether this idea lessened or increased his anxiety.

His first object, however, was to indulge her in her wish of returning home, and that without harassing her by any explanations. The result of this feeling was his immediately leaving the room into which they had entered, for the purpose of causing her carriage to drive to the door with as little delay as possible.

Helen was in truth very much in earnest in her wish to get home, and she blessed the kindness and the sympathy which so promptly enabled her to do so ; but the first hour that she passed in the undisturbed solitude of her own chamber was a very dreadful one.

It may very often happen, without any harshness on the part of the commentator, that the first love of a young lady under twenty may be treated as a whim, a fancy that is not likely to produce any very important consequence upon her future life.

But it was not so with Helen Beauchamp. She loved George Harrington, and she knew she loved him; and moreover, young as she was, she knew herself too well to believe, to think, or to hope that she should ever live to conquer the feeling, or to substitute any other in the place of it.

The result of her first hour's meditation, therefore, was a deep conviction that her destiny was blighted for life. Never before had the terrible suspicion which lay half smothered at the bottom of her own heart appeared to her so fearfully well-founded as it did during that miserable hour. But nevertheless, in the midst of this misery, she was true to the first affection of her heart, and could she by a wish have summoned the unfortunate William Rixley to her side, she would have done it; and when she had got him there, neither love, nor fear, would, for

a single moment, have caused her to turn away from him.

As the consciousness of this rushed warmly to her heart whilst she thought of him, she thanked God for saving her from the baseness of loving any other better than she loved him.

“George Harrington has so much to make him happy besides my love!” thought she. “But what has William got? He is, and ever shall be, first, and dearest! But that is not now the question before me,” murmured poor Helen, as she remembered all the recent scenes of her late happy life. “The worst of my condition is that I can never again utter one single word of truth to poor George Harrington! And he is so true himself! So very, very true! Here is my greatest misery. Were I to tell him the frightful story exactly as it is, I can easily believe that he would make light of it, and endeavour to persuade me that he loves me well enough to wish to become my husband, despite the sin and shame to which I am so nearly allied. And so he does!” thought the miserable Helen, as the tears rolled down her burning cheeks; “but is that a reason for my beguiling him

into close alliance with what his nature shrinks from?"

The answer which her heart and conscience deliberately gave to this question, may be easily imagined; but it might not be so easy for any one to guess with what admirable self devotion she finally resolved to lead him by gentle degrees far away from the belief, which she could not doubt he now cherished, of one day becoming her husband.

As to her ever marrying herself, she felt *that*, in her very heart of hearts, to be impossible; and the greatest comfort she had, was from believing that when he discovered this to be her determination respecting all others, he would be more easily reconciled to his own disappointment.

The continued silence of Mrs. Lambert had suggested to Helen the real truth, namely, that this faithful servant had actually set off upon a wildly roving expedition in search of William; and the length of time that had elapsed since their parting, rather tended to persuade her that she had not abandoned all hope of finding him, than that she had given up the search in despair.

But whether this conjecture were correct, or not, the terrible fact that if George Harrington knew all the circumstances connected with her, he would not select her as his wife, remained the same, and the poor heiress felt, notwithstanding all the wealth that had fallen upon her, that her lot was not a happy one.

CHAPTER XV.

No two heads ever plotted together with more perfect sympathy, and more perfect success, than those of Helen Beauchamp, and her friend and counsellor Mr. Phelps. Not only was the sum of money necessary for the purchase of the commission, which was the object of her cousin's ambition, provided, and safely lodged where it could be got at, on the shortest possible notice, but the two plotters contrived between them to bring the subject of choosing a profession, on more than one occasion, before the family conclave; and it was amusing to both of them to observe how skilfully the other contrived in the most easy unpremeditated manner imaginable to find an opportunity of remarking on the great ad-

vantage in every way of a man's being able to devote his talents and his energies in the direction that his inclination pointed out to him.

Mr. Phelps in particular was exceedingly eloquent on the subject, so much so indeed as to cause good Mr. Rixley to sigh deeply as he replied, "Very true, sir! Very true! There can be no doubt of it. But it is unfortunately a point upon which it but rarely happens, I suspect, that the person most deeply concerned finds himself in a position which enables him to consult his own inclination, instead of the means and convenience of those who have to provide for him."

"I am afraid so," replied Mr. Phelps. "But you agree with me, Rixley, don't you, that where circumstances permit the choice, it is a great blessing to the young aspirant for success of some kind, when the direction in which it is to be sought can be of his own selection."

"Certainly, certainly," was the cordial reply of Mr. Rixley; and it was not forgotten by those who heard him utter it.

And now, the great and important object of Helen's careful economy being achieved,

she very gently and quietly began to relax in the practice of it. Anne, who from improving health had grown into a fine, tall, handsome young woman, found her wardrobe gradually improving from day to day, and what was, if possible, still more agreeable, the occasions for displaying her pretty things were multiplying almost as fast as the pretty things themselves.

But it was all done so quietly, and with such a total absence of everything like ostentation, or display, that it appeared almost like the result of accident.

The effect of this change was very pleasantly felt throughout the neighbourhood; but somehow or other it was Anne Rixley, and not Miss Beauchamp, who now seemed to be the favourite belle of the neighbourhood, for although in real grace of form, and beauty of feature, she was immeasurably inferior to her cousin, the sort of clever system by which the young mistress of the park contrived both at home and abroad, to put her forward as the *belle par excellence* of the neighbourhood was very skilful, and very effective.

She was really a very charming, animated, and perfectly unaffected girl, and being an unwearied dancer, waltz player, and charade performer, she speedily became a celebrated personage in the neighbourhood, and, with the exception of poor George Harrington's vote, would have been unanimously declared the most captivating girl in it.

On the subject of the beautiful heiress herself, opinions varied greatly. Everybody, old and young, male and female, would have agreed in declaring that she was very handsome, and very elegant, and very obliging; but one person would have said, perhaps, that she was proud, and another might have hinted a suspicion that she was not in good health. Some might have confessed that they thought her over-studious for so young a lady; and many, if they had been quite sincere, would have admitted that they liked her cousin best, because she was more like other people.

But of all the various individuals who, to say the truth, were puzzled because they could not make out why it was that she was not like other girls of her age, none was so

painfully puzzled as George Harrington, and his sister Agnes. Till that unfortunate conversation took place upon the lawn, which left Helen with the dreadful persuasion that an insurmountable obstacle existed to her ever becoming the wife of the only man whom to her fancy it was possible for her to love, both the brother and sister had found especial delight in believing that they knew, and understood her character thoroughly; and often when Agnes had espied some particularly strong proof of her brother's devoted attachment to her friend, she had congratulated both herself and him upon the perfect safety with which he might rest all his hopes of happiness upon one whose beautiful 'transparency of character,' made it so very easy a task to guess what sort of wife she would make to a man to whom she was attached.

There was such a total absence, in the character of Helen, of everything resembling affectation, or pretence of any kind, that it seemed utterly impossible they could mistake, when they ventured to believe that she was conscious that George loved her, and con-

scious too, sweet soul, that she herself loved him.

But oh! the heavy change? Where was all their happy confidence now?

The rapidly failing health of his uncle had long led him to postpone the declaration of his attachment, and more than one reason had contributed to confirm his opinion that this delay was desirable.

The kind old man was, in truth, too evidently and too painfully declining to make it desirable that any event so full of joy as his marriage with Helen, should be projected and decided on, when every month, every day, and almost every hour might be expected to be the last of his adopted father's life.

It was, indeed, less difficult than it had been for him to leave Speedhurst Abbey without feeling that his society was wished for by its master, for the old man's memory, and almost his consciousness, was failing him. But although this made it more easy for him to be in her immediate neighbourhood, it was not a fitting time to ask her to be his wife.

Moreover, Helen was now very nearly of age; and George Harrington greatly preferred the idea of proposing himself to her, instead of having to perform that ceremony to her uncle; not to mention his great repugnance, which has been alluded to before, to the idea of proposing himself to a wealthy heiress, while he was himself only an heir expectant.

All these reasons combined, made a short delay very evidently desirable, and, till the fatal conversation related in the last chapter, this delay was no drawback to their happiness. Each party seemed to understand the other perfectly well, and each was conscious that, happy as they were already, they were only waiting for a favourable opportunity to be more happy still.

It would really have been difficult for even an acute observer to point out any two persons less likely to wreck their happiness by a *misunderstanding*; but, nevertheless, it *was* a misunderstanding that now came and placed such a bar between them, as it was, in truth, very unlikely should be ever removed.

For what reasonable chance was there that

Helen, who was herself so greatly in earnest when she listened to the high-flown language of George, should ever arrive at the conclusion that, in the first place, he was more than half in jest when he burst into magnanimous quotation, exclaiming, 'And if it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive?' or that, in the next, if he had been ten times as much in earnest as she supposed him to be, yet still that his earnestness would have melted before his love like wax before the sun, if he had conceived the very slightest idea of the untold mystery, the remembrance of which now made her so miserable?

For a considerable time after the unlucky morning when she had met him with so much happiness, and left him with a feeling so very like despair, nothing worse occurred to the imagination, either of George Harrington or his sister, than that Helen had over-fatigued herself the day before, which they had spent at Beauchamp Park, and in the course of it had all walked together to make some purchase at the neighbouring village, the want of which had occurred to them while rambling along the path which

led to it, though the distance was somewhat beyond the length of their usual walks.

But this interpretation did not last them long, for not all the efforts of poor Helen could prevent their perceiving that she was either seriously ill, or seriously unhappy, or both. There was, too, an alteration in the tone of her manner towards George, which, though so slight as to have been, perhaps, imperceptible to one less interested, was to him more painful than it would be easy to describe; and infinitely the more so, because there was nothing in it which could justify the idea of her being offended—for never, from the time they had first become acquainted had she shown herself so assiduous in her attentions to his family, or so demonstrative of tender attention to his sisters; while there was a sort of deferential gentleness in her manner to him, that seemed to indicate a higher degree of esteem and respect than a man so young could often be expected to inspire. It was, therefore, evident that Helen was not offended. There was, in truth, no ground either to hope or fear it. No; it was very clear that she was not offended, but it was

equally so that she was changed. Where was the bright glance which was wont to beam upon him as he approached, and which told him, even while her lips were silent, that he was dear to her heart, and welcome to her eyes? Where was that bright glance now? It was gone, put out, extinguished! Had there been, in any direction, the very slightest reason to suppose she was offended with him, the condition of his mind would have been very different. Conscious that every possible cause of offence could be but imaginary, his heart and his hope would have been sustained by the reasonable assurance that he should sooner or later discover where the blunder lay, and the removing it would be a task so delightful as to overpay him for all he had suffered.

But no grandmother, no venerable maiden aunt, ever bestowed more thoughtful care upon the object of her affectionate partiality than Helen did to prove to the whole family of Harrington, and to the unhappy George in particular, that there was no family in the whole country side that she valued so highly as she did theirs; and, most decidedly, that

there was no individual who could compete, in her opinion, with him in all the best and highest qualities which give one man superiority over another.

Yet, despite all this, she perfectly well managed to make him understand that if he said, "Helen Beauchamp, will you marry me?" her answer would have been, "No, George Harrington, I will not."

The poor young man was very wretched, and his sister Agnes was very wretched too; for she felt that she had deceived him, or at least that she had been the means of leading him to deceive himself. But the subject was too difficult, as well as too delicate, for her to enter upon; and it was decidedly a relief, both to her and to Helen, when an express arrived from Speedhurst Abbey, bringing the startling intelligence that his venerable uncle had perfectly recovered his intelligence, and had expressed an earnest wish to see him.

Under no circumstances could compliance with this summons have been delayed for an hour; and in less than half that time both his father and himself were in the carriage which was to convey them to Speedhurst.

It was consolatory to them both to find, on arriving there, that they were not too late. Their venerable relative was not only still alive, but still retained a much clearer use of his mental faculties than he had manifested during many months past. But it is needless to dwell on the melancholy scene, for melancholy it was, and certainly not the less so because the farewell which both father and son received from the dying man manifested all the tender affection which had marked his character through life.

The death of the venerable owner of Speedhurst Abbey took place within twenty-four hours of the arrival of his heir, who was almost immediately left alone in the large and noble mansion which was now become his own, for his father had promised to return to his family as soon as the expected event, and the melancholy ceremony which must follow it, had taken place.

CHAPTER XVI.

No man can enter upon the possession of a large property, however long he may have been familiar with the idea that the said property was some day to be his, without feeling that his position is changed. He feels immediately that he has new duties to perform, new occupations to employ him, and, if not a new, a more pungent interest in almost every object that surrounds him. And so it was now, in the case of George Harrington.

If he had been in other respects a happier man, he would very probably have felt the solitude in which he was left by his father's departure, immediately after the funeral, more painfully than he now did. But he was conscious that there was nothing of which he

stood so much in need as solitary meditation on his own very singular position.

Though as far removed as it was well possible for a man to be from the danger of believing himself beloved, when 'there was no such thing,' and though during the last few agitating weeks of his existence he had never been in the company of Helen without feeling convinced when he left her that, notwithstanding all the gentle kindness of her manner towards him, she was fixedly determined never to become his wife, he had still a strong, and, as it seemed, an involuntary persuasion at the bottom of his heart, that she loved him.

But not even to his sister Agnes had he dared to dwell on this belief; for when he had once hinted it, she had shook her head, saying, "I thought so once, George, nay at the moment I would have said that I was sure of it. But I can honestly say so no longer. No woman who loved, would so cautiously—so very cautiously—avoid every possible chance of being for a moment alone with the object of her choice, as Helen Beauchamp does, to avoid being alone with you."

And as the unfortunate young man could by no possible interpretation of signs and symptoms impugn the correctness of this statement, he could only determine not to allude to any such hope again; but, nevertheless, he did not abandon it, or rather he could not make it abandon him, for, to do him justice, he really did endeavour to convince himself that he was mistaken. But in this he could not altogether succeed.

On this point perhaps, as well as on many others, he had ample time to meditate, during several weeks of solitary residence at Speedhurst Abbey; for though well known and well beloved in the neighbourhood, he was still enough alone to think, and think, and think, quite as much as was good for him.

At length, during one of the long reveries in which he was wont to indulge under the shadows of his noble elms, it occurred to him that although he had believed, and, in fact, did still believe, that Helen had been fully aware of his attachment to her, he had never yet addressed a formal proposal for her hand, either to herself, or her uncle. It was pos-

sible therefore—just possible—that she had *not* fully understood all his motives for the delay.

The time had been indeed, before the fatal change in her manner towards him, when he felt persuaded that they had understood each other perfectly ; but it was certainly possible, —just possible—that he might have been mistaken in thinking so, and that Helen might have been offended by his seeming to take it for granted that because ‘ of all the world he loved but her alone,’ she must, as a matter of course, love him.

This hope, slight as it was, produced a feeling more nearly akin to happiness than any he had known for many weeks, and it rendered him so gay and light-hearted that he positively laughed at himself for having contrived to produce a predicament, wherein he should find himself rejoicing at the idea that Helen Beauchamp was displeased with him.

Under these circumstances it took him not long to decide what he should do. The post-bag, which left the Abbey that night, contained the following letter :—

“ *To Miss Beauchamp.*

“ In sitting down to address you, my beloved Helen, I feel that although I have much that is important to say to you, yet still that I have nothing to say which is not well known to you already. For, is it new to you, Helen, that you are dearer to me than the breath of life? Or is it unknown to you that my only hope of happiness on earth is founded on the belief that you have not been blind to the love you have inspired, and that having seen it, you have not driven me from you in displeasure?

“ The melancholy state between death and life, in which my poor uncle lingered during the last months of his existence, made me feel that it was better to trust to our hearts to make their feelings understood to each other, than seemingly to forget the death-bed of my second father, while seeking to embellish and to bless my own young life by asking the hand of the only woman I can ever love.

“ But the last sad scene of my dear uncle's life is closed, and well I know that if he could look back on those he has left behind

him, his gentle spirit would rejoice to know that I was seeking my happiness from one who, if she will accept the heart and life I offer her, is so sure to bring goodness and happiness to both. Not even Agnes shall know that I have thus written till I have received your answer.

“O! Helen! the power of a woman, truly loved, is very great! Perhaps, dearest, you remember, as well as I do, ‘the hours that we have spent when we have chid the hasty-footed time for parting us;’ and if so, may you not laugh at me when I tell you, that, till I receive your answer to this letter, I shall live in doubt and dread, lest it may not be all my devoted love leads me to wish for.

“Yours, Helen,

“Through life till death,

“GEORGE HARRINGTON.”

Mr. Harrington did not exaggerate his feelings when he said, that he should live in doubt and dread till he received Helen’s answer to the above letter. He did not wait for it long. The return of the post brought

him the following reply from Miss Beauchamp :—

“ MY VALUED FRIEND! — Permit me in this manner to address you, even though my letter should not prove either what you wish for, or expect. But I could address you in no other manner, George Harrington, without falsifying my feelings. I do, indeed, believe you to be my friend; and I do, indeed, value your friendship, and repay it with my own. And yet, I cannot consent to become your wife. You know, in part, the history of my past life; but there is much concerning it, which you do *not* know, nor is it well possible, my good friend, that you ever should; for the knowledge you lack consists, for the most part, in such an acquaintance with the effect produced upon me by the sudden and violent change in my circumstances, as it is quite impossible should ever reach any heart and understanding but my own. It must very rarely happen that two persons whose juxtaposition is such as ours appears to be at present, should have passed the earlier years of their

lives in a manner so strikingly dissimilar!

You have always enjoyed the same happy associations, and the same favourable influences that you do at present; my position was very decidedly the reverse of this; and, depend upon it, that however truly and cordially we have liked each other, we are very likely to have deep-seated and out-of-sight differences of feeling and opinion on many essential points, which, although they might never happen to come forth and display themselves in any way which should militate against all the sympathy and all the attachment necessary for the foundation of very sincere friendship, might, nevertheless, go far towards destroying the perfect harmony which ought to subsist between man and wife. Nay, I will go further, my good friend, and confess to you that, though I have never heard you utter a sentiment which I did not think becoming and laudable in you, I have heard you express thoughts and feelings which, to my own judgment, would be very greatly the reverse in me. In a word, then, dear George Harrington, I cannot consent to unite my-

self to you, because my opinion is that such a marriage would be unsuitable; and this opinion of mine is so deeply rooted in my mind, and partakes so much of the stubborn and immutable nature of *matter of fact*, that any attempt on your part to change it could produce pain, and pain only, but it never could produce conviction. Nevertheless, I would earnestly ask for the continuance of your good opinion and friendship. Your present position is such as must, of necessity, occupy too much of your time at your own home to permit your presence as much as heretofore at that of your father. This must, of course, be submitted to by all your friends, and myself among the number; but, I trust that nothing will interfere to prevent my continuing to enjoy the society of your family. Agnes and I have indulged in such constant walkings and talkings together, that I do not think we could either of us easily give up the habit.

“ Believe me, gratefully and sincerely,

“ Your Friend,

“ HELEN BEAUCHAMP.”

The degree of suffering which it cost poor Helen to write this letter could not easily be described in temperate language; but it would have cost her more still could she have guessed the degree of misery into which it plunged George Harrington. The more he studied it, the more pitiable did his state of mind become; for while the refusal of his hand was so vague as to suggest positively nothing which could be considered as a reasonable cause for it, the tone of resolute firmness, in which it was announced, seemed to forbid all reasonable hope that a purpose so expressed could ever be changed.

For a short—a very short—interval, his profound sorrow seemed to feel relief from a sentiment of anger, which suddenly arose within him. He was so deeply conscious, poor young man, of the fulness and the sincerity of his love, and the perfect devotion with which he would joyfully have been guided by her on every point whereon it was possible they could differ, that he felt there was as much injustice as cruelty, in refusing this love, because she deemed it possible they might some day differ in opinion.

What cause had he ever given her for believing that she might destroy her happiness if she trusted it to him, because he might, perchance, contradict some of the theories she had learned in her nursery at the Warren House? What cause had he ever given to justify her fearing his authority more than she trusted his love? While this very reasonable view of the question which tortured him, held possession of his mind, his drooping spirits were roused to anger, though not cheered into hope; and then, for a few short moments of passionate indignation, he assured himself that it was a very lucky chance which had led the lady to proclaim her intolerance of all opposition, before it was too late for him to profit by it.

But this state of mind was more reasonable than lasting; for, as he started up from the desponding attitude into which he had thrown himself on a sofa in his library, in order to sally forth with renewed energy, to superintend some improvements which were going on in the garden, he suddenly recollected for whose sake it was that these improvements had been projected, and such a

sickly feeling of indifference came over him concerning the embellishment of his garden, or of anything else belonging to him, that he reseated himself with a feeling of discouragement that was most truly pitiable, and which might have gone far towards convincing the over-scrupulous Helen that she had better think twice before she sacrificed herself, and her lover, to an over-wrought sense of honour, could his condition at that moment have been made known to her ! But, as no mesmeric agent was at hand to set in action the spiritual electric telegraph of which we have heard such wonders, my unfortunate lovers were doomed to be tormented by the existence of a phantom which might have been easily laid at rest by one or two simple words of truth, uttered in due season. Instead of this, however, the daily post brought in due season the following letter from Agnes Harrington, at the Oaks, to her brother, George Harrington, at Speedhurst Abbey.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ MY DEAREST GEORGE,

“ I have been earnestly endeavouring for some time to convince myself that both you and I should be acting with much more common sense if we separately and conjointly made up our minds to believe that we had both been mistaken in fancying that Helen Beauchamp ever, for a moment, conceived the idea of becoming your wife. As far as I am myself concerned, I had, as I believe you know, pretty nearly reached this point of wisdom before your last melancholy departure for the Abbey ; and I have never, as you can testify, named her in any of the letters I have written to you since. Nay, so far from my opinion concerning her indifference towards you having been in any degree changed or weakened, by what I

have remarked since you left us, I do believe that if I had never come to this decision before, I should have reached it since. It is not that she has ever alluded to you in any way that could either have created, or confirmed such an idea, for, in truth, as far as I know, she has never alluded to you at all; but since she became of age she seems to be perpetually occupied by business; and when I laugh at her for paying so much attention herself to what might easily be managed by her steward, she never replies to me jestingly, but defends herself in good set terms, pointing out very reasonably the decided advantage of understanding something of one's own affairs. Now this is much more like being a sensible young woman, who knows when she is well off, and wants nobody to help her, than like being a young lady in love, ready to make over her goods and chattels to her beloved. Nor was this all. There were many other symptoms which all tended to convince me that we were *wrong* in months long gone by, when we flattered ourselves that in loving her, you were not in any danger of loving in vain;

and *right* when, during the painful weeks which followed, we thought differently. It would, however, be almost as difficult as useless, were I to attempt recording all the trifling circumstances which have one after another led me to feel certain that love and marriage had no share in her meditations. She had no such stuff in her thoughts. But this assurance doubly sure, despite the disagreeable conclusion to which it had brought me, was greatly less tormenting than the state of mind in which I find myself now.

“ Perhaps I am wrong to appeal to you on the subject; yet I cannot think so, for have we not shared together both the joy and the sorrow, which this most mysterious subject has brought with it? Why then, should it be right for the confidence between us to cease now? Certain it is, indeed, that you have written to her without telling me of it; but that is no reason, I think, why I should conceal from you what has happened to me since.

“ I have never, as you well know, my dear George, in any way changed my conduct towards Helen, in consequence of her mysterious change of manner towards you. From

a very early period of our acquaintance, I have loved her, and I love her still. I have never ceased my visits to the Park, nor in any way changed the manner of them. My habit has been to ask for nobody but Helen, and very often I have not even asked for her; but when the hall-door has been open, which is often the case in fine weather, I have boldly made my way to her own snuggerly, without any enquiry at all, and have never failed to be received with a kind welcome. I performed this same exploit yesterday, but the result was greatly unlike anything which had happened to me before. Helen was, as usual, alone; and, as usual, seated at her pretty little study-table, beside the window. She must have been deeply occupied when I entered, for she evidently did not hear the opening of the door behind her. She was sitting with her elbow resting on the table, and supporting her head with her hand. She was aware of my approach, however, before I reached her, and turning suddenly round upon me, exhibited a face as pale as a snowdrop, and eyes which had very evidently been recently employed in weeping.

There was, moreover, in the whole aspect of her sweet face, an expression which I cannot recal even now, without feeling strongly disposed to weep myself, for it spoke a whole volume of mental suffering! But this was not all that I saw, my good brother. On the desk before her lay a letter from you. It was open, and so placed as to have been evidently the object upon which her eyes had been fixed when I entered the room. She made a strong effort to recover herself, and might have succeeded better, had she been less anxious to succeed. She threw her arms round my neck, and embraced me most affectionately, but I felt that she trembled from head to foot as she did so! I am certain that she immediately recollected that your letter was lying very conspicuously displayed upon her desk, for instead of installing me as usual on the seat beside her, on the sofa, which she always occupies, she threw her arm round me, and led me back towards the door. ‘Let us go into the east parlour, my dearest Agnes,’ said she; ‘I know that my aunt and Anne are sitting there, and they are longing to see you.’

“To resist this movement on her part was, of course, impossible, and, accordingly, I accompanied her to the east parlour, and there I certainly found her aunt and cousin, who were, as usual, extremely kind, and gave me a very cordial welcome; but as to the *longing* that Miss Beauchamp talked of, I certainly saw no symptoms of it. I speedily saw symptoms, however, on the face of my beautiful friend that she was not quite at ease in her mind concerning the state in which she had left her writing-desk, and the black-edged epistle so conspicuously exposed upon it; for, before we had been in the room two minutes, she slid out of it again, but returned after an interval just about long enough to permit of her locking up her letter and bathing her beautiful eyes; and, during the remainder of my visit, though still very pale, she contrived, in a great degree, to recover her usual manner, and talked of Lady This, and Miss That, and their seedling geraniums, almost as gaily as if nothing had happened to her.

“But something *has* happened to her, George Harrington! Something that has

shaken her self-possessed soul to the very centre; and I expect you to tell me immediately what it is. Why have you suddenly become so reserved towards me? Why have you written to her, when, in your very last letter to me, you declare yourself to be devoted to your rural occupations, and determined to think of nothing else? Or why, if anything has happened to make you change your mind, have you kept it secret from me? I should be less anxious on the subject, had it not been made so very evident to me that whatever has passed between you has been of a most painful nature. It is no light thing that could have made Helen Beauchamp look as pale as a marble statue, and tremble when she embraced me, as if she had been caught in some act of high treason, that not only put her own life in peril, but the lives of all that are dearest to her into peril also. What can you have written that should produce such effects as these? As you love me, brother, let not this letter remain many hours unanswered!

“ Ever your loving sister,

“ AGNES.”

George Harrington did not obey this earnest injunction ; he did not answer his sister's letter ; but, as rapidly as railroad speed could do it, he conveyed himself to the Oaks.

Whether he set forth upon this journey more in hope than in fear, or more in fear than in hope, it would be difficult to say. The letter which Helen had addressed to him, and which had reached him the day before that of his sister, had rendered him as miserable as it was well possible for a man to be who has nothing in his destiny to complain of, save the having become practically convinced of the fact, that 'the course of true love never does run smooth.' But, in sober truth, this was quite enough to make him very miserable—and very miserable, accordingly, he was.

For there was, with all its gentleness, a tone of such decided firmness in this cruel letter, as to make him feel that the doom it announced was immutable ; and at the moment when the above epistle from his sister was brought to him, he had a map of Southern Europe before him, and Murray in

his left hand, while he traced out a tour of some few thousands of very beautiful circuitous miles with his right, being fully determined to leave England, and not return to it till he had in some degree conquered the attachment which made him feel all the blessings with which he was surrounded to be either indifferent or distasteful to him.

But, utterly unintelligible as his sister's account of Helen seemed to be, and utterly irreconcilable as it certainly was with the calm and resolute tone of her letter, its immediate effect was to overthrow all his foregone conclusions, and to make him decide upon deferring his tour through the south of Europe, till he had made one more attempt to solve the mysteries of Helen Beauchamp's heart.

Notwithstanding her earnest entreaty for a letter, the personal appearance of her brother in the drawing-room at the Oaks surprised Agnes much less than it pleased her.

After recalling, with the most scrupulous accuracy, all that had passed between herself and Helen, from the time that George first

began to pay her any marked attention, she became convinced that Miss Beauchamp had either voluntarily deceived her, and her brother also; or that she had involuntarily deceived herself, and blighted all the happy prospects that seemed opening before them by some misconception or blundering, which might perhaps be easily set right, if the subject matter of the blunder could only be discovered, and brought to a fair examination.

That Agnes was quite right in so believing, the reader, who has been let into the secret, is aware; but it was not so easy a matter, to make this truth evident to the parties most nearly concerned.

The first thing that George heard, when, the cordial family greetings being over, he at length got Agnes to himself, was that the Beauchamp Park family had just sent out cards throughout the whole neighbourhood, for a fancy ball, at the distance of a fortnight from the present time.

“A ball!” exclaimed George. “Oh Agnes! Agnes! How cruelly have you deceived me! Do you remember the portrait you sent me

in your last letter? The marble paleness! the trembling limbs! How can this be reconciled with the sending out cards for a universal fancy ball?"

"Upon which part of my intelligence do you mean to throw a doubt, George?" returned Agnes, quietly.

"I know not!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "Of course I know nothing, and must believe whatever you tell me with undoubting faith, because you desire that I should do so. But nevertheless, my common sense revolts against both your statements being correct at one and the same time."

"It is not quite one and the same time," returned his sister. "It is two days and a-half since I sent off my letter to you, and the card inviting us to the fancy ball, only reached us this morning."

"Are you laughing at me, Agnes?" said her miserable looking brother. "You are either very cruel, or very injudicious if you are."

"I am quite as well aware of that, as you can be, George, and quite as little inclined to try such an experiment, in order to mend

matters. In no case, I think, should I feel any propensity to laugh at the strangely mysterious conduct of Helen Beauchamp. Even if your happiness were not concerned in it, the affection which I still retain for her is too sincere to permit my making a jest at her inconsistencies."

This was said by Agnes in a way to prove that she was very much in earnest, and not at all in jest; and it was with an air of vexed repentance that her brother replied, "Forgive me! I did not mean it, Agnes, but I am almost too miserable to know what I say!"

"Perhaps, George, I might be more able to guess what has been passing in her mind, if you would tell me the nature of the letter that I saw on her writing-desk, when I found her in the terrible state of agitation which I described to you," said Agnes.

"I will do more than that," he replied, "I will not only tell you the nature of the letter, but show you both the letter itself, and her answer to it."

And so saying, he drew both the epistles from his pocket-book.

“ May I ask you, George, before I read *either*, what circumstance, or what new train of reasoning, it was, which led you to alter the resolution you had made to accept her marked change of manner towards you, as a sign and signal that the intimacy which had gradually grown up between us, was not intended by Helen to pass the limit of friendship?”

“ Indeed you have a very fair right to ask the question, Agnes, and I will answer you with perfect frankness. When canvassing together all circumstances concerning the marked change which we had both perceived in Miss Beauchamp’s manner to me, we both perfectly agreed in thinking that it was intended to indicate an important and friendly caution to me, for it said, as plainly as manner could say, ‘ So far shalt thou go, and no further.’ I need not recal to you that wretched period, or remind you of all the misery I suffered. I am quite sure you have not forgotten it. But in the solitude of Speedhurst, Agnes, I went over all the old ground again, and my memory was not good-natured enough to

cheat me of any single circumstance which went to prove that Helen Beauchamp had no intention of becoming my wife. But in the midst of these long and sad meditations, a very strange idea suggested itself. In going over all the scenes which had passed between us, both hopeful, and hopeless, it occurred to me that I had never yet positively and explicitly proposed marriage to her."

"Nonsense! George," exclaimed Agnes, suddenly interrupting him. "Are you not creating a distinction where there is no difference? Do you mean to tell me that you think Helen had any doubt about your wish to marry her?"

"I did not think so before her manner changed towards me," replied her brother, "but nevertheless it is a certain fact that I never did explicitly propose to her. We used to talk of the future, but never explicitly alluded to our being married; the reason for which was, as I thought she understood as well as myself, that my poor dear uncle must die before this *future* could be reached."

“To be sure that was the reason!” cried Agnes, again interrupting him, “and I feel not the slightest doubt that Helen at that time understood it to be so as well as we did ourselves.”

“It may be so,” returned George, mournfully, “but I was mad enough to hope that it was otherwise, when left alone, Agnes, to my own imaginings; and I wrote to her accordingly, making an explicit avowal of my love, and offer of my hand. Her answer will show you, I think, why it was that I felt as I read it that it extinguished every hope for ever. And so it ought to have done, as you will say when you have perused it; yet, nevertheless, I am here again with a feeling of renewed uncertainty. Why should my letter have thrown her into the state you describe? This was, of course, the question which immediately suggested itself, and the fact is, Agnes, that I am come here solely in the hope of discovering why it was that she looked so pale and so wretched while my letter lay before her.”

“Nor can I blame you for taking this step; and still less can I wonder at your

being puzzled," replied Agnes. "But how are we to understand this last commentary? How are we to interpret this fancy ball invitation? It cannot possibly appear one half so extraordinary to you as it does to me, because you did not see her as I saw her, when I so rashly broke in upon her, and no description of mine can do justice to her manner and appearance then! But let me see her answer, George. Let me read it at once. It must have been written immediately upon the receipt of that which I saw lying upon her desk, and surely I must be able to find some trace in it of the suffering that was so terribly visible on her features when she was in the act of contemplating that to which it was an answer."

George waited not to reply, but instantly put the letter of Helen in her hand.

"Shall I read it to you?" he said.

"No, George, no!" she replied. "Let me read it myself!"

Her brother left the painful document in her hands, and silently watched her countenance as she perused it.

Having very deliberately gone through it

once, she began again at the beginning, and read it through a second time before she uttered a word. She then replaced it in her brother's hands, saying, "And I asked for this in the full hope that it would throw some light upon the mystery!"

"And you are disappointed, Agnes?" returned her brother with a melancholy smile.

"Disappointed!" she repeated. "Why before I read that letter everything was clear and plain, compared to what it is now! You offered your hand and she refused it, and though it was not very easy to understand why she should do so, and at the same time look so miserable about it, yet still, you know, it was possible that she might be very sorry for old friendship's sake that she did not feel inclined to marry, and therefore was obliged to disappoint you. This was *possible*, though it might have seemed to us more capricious than reasonable. But this explanation of her motives for refusing you has much more of mystery than of caprice in it. What on earth can she mean by saying that she has heard you express thoughts and feelings which, though laudable in you, would

be the reverse in her? And to what mysterious secrets can she allude, when she talks of the associations of her former years? My dearest George, you must think no more of her! There *must* be some painful history connected with her early years, and perhaps she is only doing her duty when she refuses to become your wife. If this be so, it is easy enough to account for the suffering which this refusal has cost her, and she deserves our admiration and affection more than ever. But let us not be less reasonable than she is, my dear brother! Absent yourself from us all, for a time. Finish your continental travels, my dear George, and change of scene, and your own good sense, will enable you to forget this disappointment, and to look elsewhere for a wife. There is not much chance, I should think, of your being equally unfortunate a second time."

"It is possible I might be more so," he replied with something like a bitter smile; "I might offer myself, sister Agnes, to another, and I might be accepted."

"Very good, George. And now you are

beginning to be witty, I have good hopes that you will not break your heart. But what say you to my travelling project?"

"The project certainly has its attractions, Agnes, and I may think further of it; but not just at present, for I am doing a good deal to the gardens at the Abbey, and I should not like to leave England till I have accomplished the object I have in view. Meanwhile, however, you will not be annoyed by any symptoms of love-sickness on my part. Do you think, Agnes, that I shall be included in the Beauchamp Park invitation?"

"Of course you will, if you are still here," was her reply.

"And that I certainly will be," he returned gaily. "I have an immensity of curiosity on the subject."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for sorry indeed should I be if this strange conduct on the part of Helen were to break up the intercourse between the families. I love Helen dearly," continued Agnes, with feeling, "and the being convinced, as from her letter I think we must be, that her early

years were passed under very disadvantageous circumstances, will never lead me to love her less. Whatever her former companionships may have been, -I know what she herself is now; and she must hint at something worse than even vulgar relations, before I shall give her up."

George Harrington listened to this with great satisfaction. He too, as well as his sister, was of opinion that when Helen alluded to the disadvantages of her early years, she meant to confess that she had lived among low-born relatives; but, unlike Agnes, he saw nothing sufficiently important in this to form a lasting barrier between them; on the contrary, indeed, from the moment his sister suggested it, he devoutly prayed the gods that it might be true, feeling something very like a comfortable assurance at his heart that no such cause could keep them asunder long. And yet George Harrington was far from being indifferent to such considerations as had brought his sister to the conclusion that, charming as Helen was in person, intellect, and demeanour, and highly as she was placed by

fortune, she might be, and doubtless was, unhappily situated with respect to the connexions with whom she had passed her early life.

This solution certainly appeared to him the most obvious, amidst the darkness in which Helen's conduct had involved him; and he very naturally determined to receive it as the true one, and to act accordingly; unless he subsequently saw reason to believe that he and his sister also had failed to interpret her mysterious letter aright.

Had he avowed this determination to Agnes in the same words in which I have now expressed it, she would have agreed with him most cordially as to the propriety of doing so; and yet nothing could be much less alike than the result which they respectively contemplated. Agnes paused not a moment in coming to the conclusion that if such were the fitting interpretation to be put upon Helen's letter, the obvious, and inevitable consequence was, that she never ought to become the wife of her brother; while her brother, with equal distinctness and rapidity, arrived at a conclusion which was precisely the reverse.

But here let me do George Harrington the justice to say, that it was not the influence of Helen's personal beauty which bribed him to this decision ; neither was it by any means from either ignorance, or indifference, concerning the importance which ought to be attached to the character, as well as the position, of those with whom we are brought into connexion by marriage. He understood, and felt all this very sufficiently ; as much so, perhaps, as even Agnes herself ; but he thought, and he was quite right in thinking so, that he knew more of Helen than she did ; he knew her temper, heart, and intellect better. It was not that Agnes was either a careless or a dull observer. But 'the sweet passion of love' is made up of a multitude of susceptibilities, some more, and some less sublime, but forming altogether a sort of spiritual electricity, which enables one human mind to detect, and combine with, the occult qualities of another, with a force that is often stronger than reason, though in no wise contrary to it.

But at the same moment that he discovered this essential difference of opinion

between himself and his sister, he very steadfastly determined not to communicate the discovery to her ; and here again he was very right.

There was, for the present at least, no chance whatever that either party would be able to convict, or convince the other of error, and discussion therefore must be worse than idle. So there was no discussion between them on this point at all ; and they both fortunately agreed in thinking that in the interval which was likely to take place before the young master of Speedhurst Abbey set off to finish his continental tour, their best course would be to alter nothing in their outward demeanour towards Helen ; to keep the secret of the offer, and its refusal, entirely to their own hearts, and to reconcile themselves as speedily as possible to taking the good the gods had provided, without making themselves miserable about what was denied.

Perhaps George did not deserve quite all the credit his sister gave him for the air of genuine resignation with which he listened to this edict, and submitted to it ; perhaps

she was in no degree aware of the pleasant effect she had produced on his mind, by explaining so clearly and cleverly the probable cause of Helen's refusal. It was with the most perfect sincerity that he had acknowledged his conviction that her interpretation was correct; but he did not feel himself called upon to say how much consolation he found from her description of poor Helen's suffering under the performance of the terrible duty she had imposed upon herself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

No disappointment awaited George Harrington concerning his invitation to the fancy ball about to be given at Beauchamp Park. But, though very well pleased to receive it, he fell into a very deep fit of very grave musing, upon the style and manner in which he should make his appearance there.

His meditations were not confined to the style in which he should decorate his person, or to that by which he should regulate his manner. The first question was not without its difficulties, but the second, as may easily be believed, was infinitely more puzzling still.

George was no coxcomb, but nevertheless he was not wholly ignorant of the fact that

he was rather a handsome fellow, and then visions of sundry very becoming costumes did certainly come into his head, and even shot from thence to the point of his pencil, causing the implement to sketch, with very brilliant rapidity, Greeks, Turks, Figaros, and Hamlets.

But he suddenly stopped short in this agreeable occupation, and tore the paper into atoms. "What an idiot I am!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Do I hope to win her by the aid of my tailor? If I go at all, it shall be in my ordinary attire."

But the moment after, he found that there would be something very particularly marked, and therefore very particularly wrong in this, and then, having manfully resolved that he would wear the livery of Folly, in some form or other, but without giving a thought to his looking well or ill in it, he began to fix his thoughts with a good deal of anxiety upon the degree of familiarity with which it would be proper that he should address her, either in his own character, or in any other that he might take it into his head to assume. But, on this point, at least, he

had sufficient common sense, and sufficient consciousness of not being altogether sure of keeping a resolution if he made it, to induce him to bring this particular cogitation to a conclusion, by deciding that he would not make any resolution at all, but be guided by his own feelings at the moment, inspired as they were sure to be by her manner of receiving him.

But then came the important question as to whether he ought or ought not to call at Beauchamp, after the correspondence which had taken place between himself and its fair mistress. But, fortunately, this was a point upon which he could still call his faithful Agnes to council, notwithstanding her perfectly unsuspecting ignorance of the ultimate hope which lay nestling at the bottom of his heart.

After the meditation of a minute or two, she gave it as her opinion that if he intended to accept the invitation to the ball, he ought to call upon the Beauchamp Park family before it took place. George discreetly fixed his eyes upon the carpet when this wished-for decision was pronounced; but the flush

which mounted to his forehead told his sister plainly enough, that her opinion on the subject had not been listened to without considerable emotion, which, she doubted not, was of a very painful kind.

“ I have vexed you, my dearest George ! ” said she, with true sisterly feeling, though certainly with no great sympathy. “ But you must pass the ordeal of a first meeting, at some time or other ; that is, if you accept her offered friendship. The question, in my opinion, is not whether you should make a morning visit at the Park, before you present yourself at the ball, for if you decide upon doing the last, you cannot in common civility avoid the former. The real question is whether you have courage enough to meet Helen in society without suffering more than she ought to see you suffer ; or whether it would not be better for you to go abroad at once, and remain beyond the reach of danger from meeting her again, till time and your own good sense shall have enabled you to conquer your unfortunate attachment.”

George continued to keep his eyes fixed on the carpet as she spoke, and when she

had finished he drew out his pocket handkerchief, and blew his nose, which produced a painful and compunctious feeling on the heart of his sister, for she fancied that he was either weeping, or about to weep.

However, he almost immediately answered in a tolerably cheerful voice. "Yes, Agnes, you are quite right. That is, in truth, the real question. But there is, I think, always something cowardly and contemptible in running away under any circumstance, and though quite aware that I may have some disagreeable scenes to encounter, I had rather endure whatever may happen to me, than positively take to flight.—So I will ride over to the Park to morrow morning, I think, and get the first awkward meeting over as soon as possible."

"Shall I go with you, George?" said Agnes, in a tone that shewed plainly enough that she most sincerely pitied him.

"No, my dear Agnes," he replied, "I will get through it as well as I can; but I suspect that my part of the performance will not be graceful enough for me to be anxious to exhibit it."

Nothing more passed between them on the subject, nor did Agnes even know when it was his purpose to perform this painful but necessary ceremony ; she saw plainly enough that he had no inclination to talk about it, and though she was a little surprised at this reserve, she was determined to indulge him, for she felt persuaded that such an interview could not fail of being intensely painful, and she pitied him most sincerely.

Yes, Agnes did pity her brother exceedingly ; but though she would willingly have stood courageously beside him in more perilous encounters, she was, at the bottom of her heart, very sincerely glad to escape this ; one reason for which assuredly was, that she knew she could do him no good, and could only have brought with her to the meeting an additional element of embarrassment.

George prepared himself for the interview by very attentively reading the letter of Helen which he had received in answer to his own. Having fully accepted the rational interpretation of Agnes as to the latent meaning of this letter, it no longer appeared

to him such a desperate document as it had done when he first perused it; yet still there was enough of steadfast purpose in its tone to make his heart quail as he meditated on the possibility of her fancying that it was her duty to adhere to the resolution she had announced.

This sinking of the heart, as he meditated on her taking such a view of the question, was the strongest possible proof that he did justice both to the rectitude, and the strength of Helen's character. His best chance lay in the possibility of making her feel that in her case, as in many others, there might be conflicting duties, and that the sending him to an early grave, with a broken heart, might be a heavier sin, than permitting him to ally himself, through her, with some individual, or individuals, less perfect than herself.

While determining, however, to pay his respects to the heiress of Beauchamp Park, he came very decidedly to the conclusion that nothing could be so injurious to his cause as any attempt at present to shake her resolution. Something indeed whispered to him that the

day might come (if the tone of their former intercourse could be restored) when she too might think that she had overrated the importance of her early associations, for if they had really produced any effect that could reasonably keep them asunder, he must have made the discovery ere now; and to this he was determined to trust.

As to the precise arrangement concerning the time and place for their first meeting, his former familiar knowledge of her daily routine of occupation enabled him to settle it very skilfully. He knew perfectly well that when the family separated after breakfast, Mr. Rixley invariably retired to enjoy a peaceful perusal of the daily paper in the library; and as invariably did Mrs. Rixley take her station in a peculiarly pleasant morning sitting-room, wherein she was sure to find, not only her favourite sofa, her worsted work, and some half-dozen or so of the last-arrived new books, but her daughter, also, who pretty constantly employed the first hour or two after breakfast in practising all the intricate new polkas and waltzes, by the bewitching influence of which

she contrived to convert every party given in the neighbourhood into a dance.

Anne Rixley's style of playing these German fascinations was really admirable, and her mother so well loved to listen to her, that it must have been some very remarkable occurrence which could have tempted her to give it up.

All this was perfectly well known to George Harrington, and, therefore, without letting anybody into his confidence, besides his groom, he found his horse precisely at ten o'clock in the morning, not pawing the gravel before the door, but waiting for him, both out of sight and out of hearing, just beyond the precincts of the oak-sheltered paddock which surrounded the house.

A very few minutes of sharp riding brought him to Beauchamp Park, and having reached it unattended, he rode, as he had often done before, into the stable-yard, and gave his horse to one of the stable servants. He asked no questions concerning the whereabouts of the family, but turned with neighbourly license through a small door which led into the shrubberies.

Harrington knew perfectly well that Helen, in all human probability, was in the conservatory, and, accordingly, it was there he sought, and there he found her. She had heard his step, and it may be that she knew it too, before he became visible, for when he entered and first caught sight of her, instead of being as pale as Agnes had described her, the fair face was blooming with as radiant a blush as ever dyed a virgin cheek.

The first moment of meeting was doubtless one of pretty severe trial to both of them; but this first emotion was got through very well, and very quietly, as far as outward appearances could be trusted, on both sides; this very desirable result being the more easily obtained, because it was the steadfast purpose of both that so it should be.

As far as this went, it mattered little how wide might be the difference between the ultimate object of the lady and that of the gentleman; and it must be confessed that this ultimate difference was considerable; that of the lady being to remain unchangeably within the line of single blessedness which she had marked out for herself; while that of

the gentleman was to 'bide his time' with all the appearance of the most submissive obedience, but never to abandon the hope of making her his wife as long as they both should live, and live single.

Fortunately, however, there was no occasion for either of them just then to enter upon the subject of their future intentions; each thought, and thought very properly, that they had been sufficiently explicit upon the subject already, and all embarrassment therefore upon that score was spared them.

After the usual mutual enquiries for their respective families had been exchanged, the attention of George Harrington was called to sundry alterations and improvements in the gardens of which, as he truly said, he had heard nothing, but which appeared, as far as he could judge, to be very ingenious in the conception, and very promising as to the general effect of the result.

"I am glad you think so," she replied, "for some of my manœuvres have been rather bold, and as I have consulted no one but my uncle and the gardener, your approval is very satisfactory. But we are not sufficiently

advanced as yet to talk much about it. If you were not something of a gardener yourself, Mr. Harrington, you would not have understood what we are about so much as you appear to do. But do not talk of my winter garden scheme to Agnes, for I mean to surprise her."

George promised to be very discreet on the subject, and then the conversation went on in the question and answer style very glibly, till at length Helen said, "And now, Mr. Harrington, I think I have told you all that I know about my plans, myself; so I will take you to see my aunt and Anne."

"I shall be truly glad to see them, and your good uncle also," he replied. "It seems an age since I have had that pleasure."

And so saying he followed her through a labyrinth of newly marked-out walks, and flower beds. But just as they were about to leave the precincts of Helen's magnificent innovations, which were divided from the lawn behind the house by a thick shrubbery, he made a hasty step in advance which brought him before her as she walked on, when suddenly turning round, and facing

her, he gently laid two fingers on her arm, as if to make her pause, and then said, "Helen! Your will is law. It ought to be so, and it shall be so! Fear not that you will be tormented by me. I will teach myself to rejoice at being permitted to be your friend."

She started when he first stopped her, but recovered herself immediately, and said cheerfully, "I thank you, George Harrington; I thank you sincerely."

"And we are then to be as good friends, Helen, as if I never had written you that letter?" said he, looking at her earnestly.

"Yes, yes!" was her reply, uttered rapidly, and turning aside her head, as if fearing to meet his eyes.

He ventured, however, to hold out his hand, and she put hers into it; upon which, with the friendly and familiar action of a brother, he drew her arm under his own, as he had often done in days of yore, and walked, neither very slowly nor very rapidly, towards the house, while he very demurely descanted on the very extensive alterations she appeared to be making in her gardens.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHILE these very important, but very unguessed-at, occurrences were passing over Helen, her sincere liking and friendship for Mr. Phelps continued without the slightest diminution; neither had his sincere affection for her been in any degree lessened, though he was very nearly as conscious as she was herself that he was no longer fully in possession of her confidence. But there does sometimes exist between human beings a degree of sturdy obstinate esteem which nothing less weighty than obvious matter of fact testimony can suffice to destroy, and the esteem which old Mr. Phelps felt for Helen Beauchamp, was of this quality. He was quite sure that she

had something on her mind which affected her happiness, and weighed upon her spirits, but as she evidently wished to conceal the cause from him, he immediately came to the conclusion that the secret, whatever it was, was not her own secret only, and this not only exonerated her from all blame in his eyes, but gave him an additional reason for thinking that she certainly was 'made up of every woman's best.'

But Mr. Phelps when left in the dark, very naturally, like all other sharp-witted people, felt a strong inclination to grope his way out, and he soon fancied that he saw a glimmer of light in the direction in which probably most people would have looked for it, namely, that in which the tender passion of love was most likely to appear.

Now, whatever love passages had hitherto passed between George Harrington and Helen Beauchamp, they had been, more perhaps from the character of the individuals than from any systematic purpose on the part of either of them, entirely invisible to all eyes save those of Agnes.

Mr. Phelps, in short, had no more idea that

Helen was in love with George Harrington, than that she was in love with him. But still he thought she must be in love with some one, for how else could he account for the change that had taken place in her? Not indeed that she was in any material respect changed towards him; no! There was the same unmistakeable expression of pleasure in her sweet face every time that he unexpectedly appeared before her; but there was not that fresh and brightly sustained interest while engaged with him, either in literary or philosophical discussion, that used to make their long *tête-à-têtes* so delightful.

More than once he had found it necessary to restate a dogma, or repeat an argument, before she looked as if she fully understood him. Now this was quite new in their intercourse, and by no means agreeable. But what was worse still was the fact that when at length she *did* appear to comprehend what he was talking about, she did *not* appear to take much interest in it. And so at last the rational old gentleman came to the conclusion that Helen was in love.

Having reached this point, it was not

very long before he arrived at another, for he discovered, or fancied he had discovered, that her cousin Henry was the happy man. This discovery certainly took off in his estimation a little of the beautiful disinterestedness which he had so warmly admired in all her economical efforts before she became of age, in order to procure for this highly favoured youth the object of his first ambition. But good Mr. Phelps soon felt ashamed of himself for thinking she could have acted upon any motive more amiable than that of gratifying this honourable ambition of the man she loved, and he determined to atone for this injustice by taking an early opportunity of delicately hinting to her that he had discovered her secret, and greatly approved her choice.

An opportunity for doing this soon occurred, for a letter from Henry, who had now been nearly a year abroad, arrived very soon after the philosopher had made this acute discovery, announcing his return to England, and his hope of being at Beauchamp Park in a few days.

This pleasant news was speedily circulated

throughout the neighbourhood, and the lucky chance which brought him back in time for the fancy ball was welcomed most cordially, especially by all the young ladies, for Henry Rixley was acknowledged to be the best dancer in the county, and was on that, as well as on many other accounts, so great a favourite, that the delightful invitation itself had scarcely given more pleasure than did the sudden announcement that he was to be a sharer in the fête.

It so chanced that on the same day on which Henry's letter announcing his arrival in England reached Beauchamp Park, one of the large dinner parties, which were now very frequent there, took place. Mr. Phelps was one of the guests, and having heard the general burst of cordial satisfaction with which Mr. Rixley's announcement of this news was received at the dinner table, he took an opportunity, when rambling *tête-à-tête* with Helen on the following morning through her new flower garden, to revert to this circumstance, as a means of leading to the subject upon which he was so anxious to speak to her without reserve.

“What a very popular individual your cousin Henry seems to be!” said the old gentleman looking at her rather earnestly. “He certainly was proclaimed by acclamation at your dinner table yesterday as the one thing needful to make a fancy ball an epitome of perfect felicity.”

If Mr. Phelps expected to see his companion blush upon hearing this abrupt mention of her cousin’s name, he was not disappointed, for her beautiful face was instantly suffused with the celestial rosy-red which has been rather arbitrarily, termed ‘Love’s proper hue.’

“Dearest Henry!” she eagerly exclaimed. “I thought you would remark it, Mr. Phelps, Oh! If you knew what a pleasure it is to me to think that he may still be prosperous and happy, notwithstanding the heavy misfortune of my having been born! But nobody can ever know—can ever understand this! Not even you, Mr. Phelps.”

Mr. Phelps smiled aside as he marked the ingenious manner in which she contrived to confess the tender interest which she took in his prosperity, without compromising her

maiden dignity by pleading guilty to the 'soft impeachment.' He remained silent for a moment, and then replied, taking her arm and passing it in a confidential sort of manner under his own, "Come, come, Helen! It is too late in the day for you and me, when we are talking to each other *tête-à-tête*, to say one thing, when we mean another. I know that you love Henry Rixley, and that you mean to marry him when he shall have tamed his vehement military ardour by serving for a campaign or two; I know this, Helen, quite as well as if you had informed me of it with all the solemnity of a most important avowal—so do not be foolish enough to say no about it, my dear child, for I tell you frankly that I shall not believe you."

Helen Beauchamp loved truth dearly. She loved it conscientiously, she loved it philosophically, and she loved it habitually. But never was an untruth offered in a more tempting form than that which was now presented for her acceptance. She could not but fear, for she had very good and sufficient reason for fearing it, that many of her friends and acquaintances had shrewdly suspected

that the marked intimacy between the Harrington family and her own would end by a union between Speedhurst Abbey, and Beauchamp Park ; and the gossip, the wondering, and all the imaginative explanations, likely to follow upon the discovery that everybody had been mistaken, or at any rate that the affair was very mysteriously broken off, formed no trifling addition to the suffering which weighed so heavily upon her during this portion of her existence. The possibility of getting clear of all this by permitting the circulation of a different fable was a desperately strong temptation offered to her integrity ; but nevertheless she would probably have had courage to resist it had her old friend remained with her only one moment longer ; but perceiving that she hesitated how to answer him, and believing he had put her in a painful position by his abruptness, he suffered her arm to drop as suddenly as he had taken it, and gaily saying, "I will not torment you any more with my discoveries just at present, dear Helen," he bustled off into the shrubberies, and left her to meditate upon the comparative value of truth and its opposite at her leisure.

CHAPTER XX.

Two days after the dinner party mentioned in the last Chapter, Henry Rixley reached Beauchamp Park ; and, short of the species of reception which Mr. Phelps had predicted for him, it was pretty nearly impossible that he could have been more affectionately welcomed. The first hour or two that they all passed together was occupied by such a deluge of questions and answers concerning where he had been since he left one place, and what he had liked best when he got to another, that nothing approaching grave and confidential talk had taken place amongst them ; but early the next morning, very nearly at the same hour at which Henry had communicated the heaviest sorrow of his heart to his cousin Helen some twenty

months before, they met again under the greenwood tree, and being again *tête-à-tête*, the grateful young traveller eagerly seized the opportunity of expressing all the gratitude he felt for her kindness to him.

For Helen had not trusted to the regularity with which his salary might be paid in order to satisfy herself that this very happy interlude in his life's history was not dimmed by the want a of little 'needfu' cash.'

"Had you been my own dear mother, Helen, you could not have been more thoughtful about my enjoyments; and how you could manage to time your generous gifts so happily must ever be a mystery, for I do positively declare that I never once particularly wished for a little extra cash, that I did not speedily afterwards get a polite intimation that if I would be pleased to draw on Messrs. So-and-So, I should be sure to get it. How can I thank you as I ought to do for all your generous kindness to me?"

"By not calling anything I have done by such a name, dear Henry," she very gravely replied. "Though no great lawyer, I suffi-

ciently understand the omnipotent power of the law to be aware that it is right and proper for me to possess this place, and all the thousands a year that it brings with it, instead of you, or your good father either. But this need not, and cannot prevent my remembering that, had I never existed, all the wealth I now enjoy must have been yours, for my father had no other heir. Such being the facts, cousin Henry, it cannot be very difficult for you to understand that I do not feel entitled to many thanks, merely because I find pleasure in now and then preventing your being inconvenienced by the want of a little money. Besides, you must observe, if you please, that I run no risk of doing mischief by permitting myself this indulgence, for I happen to know from the best possible authority, namely, that of your father, that though your allowance has been a small one, you have never run in debt at College. So no more about gratitude—no more of that, Hal, if thou lov'st me!"

"I do love you, Helen, and I will not plague you with any more thanks; but you will not scold me for telling you how greatly

I have enjoyed myself? I suppose," he added, with a sigh, "I suppose that everything in this world is a mixture of good and evil. For instance, I greatly doubt if any man could have enjoyed the pleasure and excitement of travelling so keenly as I have done, unless, like me, he knew that his future years were to be spent in a way that must render the recurrence of such delightful excitement impossible. But the pleasure is not over for me. I shall never forget what I have seen.—There is a great comfort in that. What a beautiful world this is, Helen! You have no idea of the magnificence, the variety, the intense loveliness of the various scenery and the various climates, through which I have passed since I left England; you don't know what *blue* means, when it is used to describe the colour of an Italian sky; you don't indeed, Helen! Claude himself does not dare to give it in all its splendour. Or perhaps his unguents failed him."

Helen looked at him, and smiled.

"Don't laugh at me, Helen! Don't fancy that I am trying to cram you with travellers' tales, as full of lies as of wonders. I will

exaggerate nothing when I am talking to you of what I have seen, but it will be a great pleasure to describe it all. Besides the doing so will impress it on my memory, and henceforth, you know, that is the treasury on which I must draw for the pleasure of enjoying fine scenery."

"And do you think the remembrance of what you have seen will suffice to gratify this passionate love of scenery for the rest of your life?" said Helen, again looking at him with a smile.

An expression of painful feeling passed across the young man's features for a moment; but whatever might be its cause he evidently made an effort to get rid of it, for he returned his cousin's smile as he replied, "I take the good the gods provide me, and do not mean now to quarrel with my destiny, even if I have never again the good fortune to pass the 'Herring Pond.' Has my father been talking much since I went away about my ordination. Has he got his eye upon any particular curacy for me, Helen?"

"No, dear Henry, I am pretty sure he has not. We ought all of us to do him the jus-

tice to believe that if he had the power of placing you in a profession that you felt more suited to, he would be very glad to do it. He acknowledged this to Mr. Phelps the other day when they were discussing the subject together. No! It is I who have fixed my mind on a particular cure, and not my uncle," returned Helen.

"You!" exclaimed Henry in an accent of surprise. "Of course I ought to feel greatly flattered by your thinking of me at all, but fixing upon a curacy for me was one of the very last ways in which I should have expected you to shew it."

Helen did more than smile now; she laughed outright.

Henry stared at her.

"My dear cousin," she said, endeavouring to recover her gravity, "I fear you never will be a correct speaker, for it is evident to me that you have no very clear idea of the nature of the English language. If you were already in orders I should be dreadfully alarmed at the idea of your preaching, inasmuch as you have just made it clearly evident that you do not know the difference between *curacy*, and

cure. I should say, particularly in your case, that not even *rectory* and *cure* were synonymous, and surely curacy and cure must be wider apart still. No, dear Henry, I have not been looking out for a curacy, but I think I have found a cure for the malady that seemed to threaten you, namely, that of endeavouring to force your faculties into the performance of a task for which nature has not fitted you. The remedy I prescribe for this, my dear cousin, is your preparing yourself with all convenient dispatch to join your regiment, which I am told is destined for service at the Cape at no very distant period."

"My regiment!—Join my regiment! What can you mean, Helen Beauchamp? It is impossible you can be laughing at me! It is not like you."

"I hope not, Henry. No, dearest cousin, I am very greatly in earnest in telling you, that, by and with the assistance of our most kind friend Mr. Phelps, a commission has been secured for you in one of the regiments which I remember your having named as the most desirable. If you had come home at the time you first talked of, which

was six months ago, and before I became of age, you would have found the commission ready for you; for I beg to observe, friend Harry, that I am an excellent manager—a little in the miser line now and then perhaps, but nobody has a right to complain of that, you know, if it amuses me, and some of my saving tricks certainly did amuse me, after you went away. It really is almost a pity, as far as I am concerned, that the necessity for them is over. However this full-blown majority of mine is convenient in some respects, because it has enabled me to deposit sufficient money in the proper quarter to purchase on as rapidly as may be, until you have attained your majority too. And now tell me, does this please you, my dear disinherited cousin?"

Henry Rixley looked absolutely bewildered by this intelligence. He gazed with a puzzled expression of countenance into the fair face of his smiling companion, not exactly as if he thought she was in jest, but yet as if he were afraid of permitting himself to be too sure that she was in earnest. After standing immovably still, with his eyes

fixed upon her, for about a minute, he drew a long sigh which really sounded as if he were gasping a little for want of breath, and pronounced the words, "And my father?"

"Fear nothing from that quarter, Henry," she replied, affectionately pressing the arm upon which she was leaning. "Everything is exactly as you would wish it there. Mr. Phelps and I took good care to ascertain that, before we proceeded too far in the business to involve ourselves in any domestic troubles on that score. Everything is right in the home department. Father, mother, sister, are all of one mind on the subject as completely as heart can wish. If you are pleased, dearest Henry, you will not find a single doubting, or dissentient voice at home."

"Pleased! If I am pleased!" exclaimed poor Henry in almost uncontrollable agitation. "Oh Helen! Helen! I wish now that I had not taken so much pains to conceal from you all I suffered at the idea of sitting down as a country curate for life! If I had let you see only a tenth part of what I suffered then, you would be more able to understand how great is the happiness you

have bestowed upon me now ! Shall I thank you ? No ! The fullest, the most glowing expression of thanks ever uttered by man would fall so short, so very short of what I would wish to express at this moment, that I am positively determined to make no attempt of the kind ! There is, however, one little remark which I will venture to make, though I am sadly afraid that your woman's wit is not of a calibre to enable you to comprehend it. You have once, and again, cousin Helen, hinted at the desperate wrong you did me when you took the liberty of coming into the world. Now, setting aside the fact, which has been repeatedly hinted to you, but to which you have never appeared to pay any attention, that if you had never been born, your father's estate would never have been mine, setting aside this fact, I do implore you to believe me when I declare that I would not give up the position in which you have placed me, to become a *landed gentleman* with an estate ten times the value of yours. For then it would have been my *duty* to stay at home, and look after my acres, and my tenants ; and upon my word and honour, I

think I would rather be a red Indian. While now!—But I will not describe this glorious *now* further, than to say that it gives me everything that I most coveted on earth.”

Helen had spoken very truly, when she said that her little saving tricks had amused her ; but had she suffered, and pretty severely too in the performance of them, she would have thought herself most amply repaid for all she had done, by contemplating the changed aspect of Henry Rixley, and listening to his own energetic description of his happiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

NOTHING could have been better timed than this return of Henry, and the bright demonstration of his exceeding happiness which followed it; for though Helen's high-toned character kept her from sinking into the degradation of pining sorrow, because one precious hope had been disappointed, she did in truth suffer from the disappointment more deeply than it would have been easy for any one to believe who only saw her when in society.

But Helen was not a person who lived for herself, and herself only; the watching the gay spirits of Henry, the satisfaction of his father, the gratified ambition of his mother, and the overflowing joy of his gay-hearted

sister, seemed to restore her again to happiness, and the delightful consciousness that she had the power of thus embellishing the existence of those she loved, taught her to feel the value of her wealth and her independence greatly more than she had ever done before.

With the sort of healthy strength of mind which made so essential a feature of her character, she welcomed this feeling of satisfaction as an especial blessing, and wisely determined to keep it in useful activity. She had long ago made up her mind as to the degree of retribution she should make to her cousins by the disposal of her property in case she never found her brother ; but as she felt herself quite sure that she should cling to the hope of his being restored to her to the last hour of her own existence, it was obvious to her common sense that this resolution in their favour might be of little or no advantage to them, whatever it might be to their heirs. The only method, therefore, by which she could hope effectually to benefit them was by disposing of her noble income in such a way as might be most likely to be advantageous to them.

She meditated on this matter for a long time before she finally decided upon the system she should pursue. The question stated broadly might be divided into two propositions: should she economize her income, by contracting her style of living, for the purpose of bestowing upon her cousins the money so saved? Or should she give them the advantages of a splendid home as long as they remained with her, together with all the other benefits, more easily understood than enumerated, arising from the associations to which such a style of living gives easy access? She finally decided (taking the whole family, herself included, into the account), that the latter method would be the best; a decision which was rendered the more reasonable by the obvious fact that if indeed her brother were ever restored to her, the having regularly spent every shilling of her income in the interval would be no impediment to her providing very nobly for her cousins afterwards, without depriving herself of the dear power of providing very nobly for him likewise.

All these business-like meditations did her

good. Few occupations perhaps are more hostile to the growth of green and yellow melancholy, than a practical attention to the material interests of life, especially when, as in the case of our fair Helen, this practical attention is to be bestowed upon the expenditure of a large income, instead of the thrifty management of a small one.

Moreover it cannot be denied that Helen loved splendour. She would however most certainly have conquered that love with the same characteristic steadiness of purpose with which she had done battle with another species of love of a more insidious kind, had she not been very conscientiously persuaded that it was the duty of every one possessed of a large income, to spend it freely ; and therefore in deciding upon being as sumptuous in her manner of living as her income would allow her to be, she was acting perfectly in accordance with her sense of duty.

She had read and thought too much on the subject of gratuitous alms-giving to trust to that for the utility to her fellow creatures which she was fully aware it was her duty

to exercise ; and where this feeling is one of the main springs which regulate expenditure, there is very little danger of such a degree of profuseness as shall open a road to ruin.

From the day that Helen had first become her own housekeeper she had never upon any occasion made the subject of her domestic finances a matter of discussion in the family. For the first few months of this period, both her uncle and aunt had felt a little anxious lest her systematic avoidance of the subject arose from her feeling it to be a painful one. But the very particularly quiet, and orderly way in which all things proceeded under her rule very soon set their kind hearts at ease on this subject ; though until the carefully preserved secret of the purchase of Henry's commission was disclosed, some few little incongruities in her system were thought to be discernible ; when it was discovered, however, that all these had their beginning and ending in the generous project of providing for him in a way so happily accordant with his wishes, and his character, her affectionate anxiety for his welfare was, if anything, a less remarkable trait

in their estimation, or at any rate a less unexpected one, than the skilful and steady generalship by which she had enabled herself to accomplish it.

When, therefore, upon her coming of age, she assumed the management of her large income, with the assistance only of one honest man who was both bailiff and steward, without making a single observation to any one, either on the pains or the pleasures which this important epoch of her life brought with it, no symptom of alarm or anxiety of any sort was felt either by her uncle or her aunt, although they had themselves endured no small share of pecuniary embarrassment during great part of their married life, and were both of them, probably in consequence of this, of a somewhat nervous temperament respecting money affairs; but the great *aplomb* of the young heiress seemed to have cured all this, and they marked her well-regulated—but often rather sumptuous—proceedings without fear or blame of any kind. Mrs. Rixley indeed seemed to think that she very satisfactorily summed up all the observations that could rationally be

made on the subject, by saying that 'it was pretty Helen's way.'

Now in order to do 'pretty Helen' full justice on this subject, it is necessary to remember that had she made it her habit to have recourse to family conclaves and consultations upon all her projects, either of saving or of spending money, the result would inevitably have been to bring an unceasing tax of grateful thanks, and modest remonstrances, upon every member of the Rixley family; for most certain it is that their interest, or their pleasure, was, in some shape or other, the real object of all her most important manœuvrings.

Had no dear trembling hope of the return of her brother been ever, and always alive in her heart (though never named, or hinted at to any human being), she would have managed all her affairs much more simply; or rather, she would have let them manage themselves; which they would have done in a very satisfactory manner, had no such hope existed.

But Helen's loving thoughtfulness for the family into which she had been so affection-

ately grafted, did not confine itself to the simple process of taking care that her pecuniary affairs were always in a healthy condition. Though the junior of her cousin Anne by a year or two, she felt a watchful sort of anxiety about all her little personal affairs, which she herself often used to say had a very maternal character.

Those 'fable not' who declare that many a celebrated beauty owes as much of her renown to her *mamma*, and her *modiste*, as to Nature. Anne Rixley certainly never deserved the epithet of 'ugly,' which her father, a little in sport, had bestowed upon her; neither did she, strictly speaking, deserve that of beautiful, which was now freely bestowed upon her by a large proportion of the Beauchamp Park neighbourhood.

Now to this delusion, if it must be so called, Helen had very greatly contributed in many ways, and if she had been ten times the young lady's *mamma*, she could not more thoroughly have enjoyed this result of her clever manœuvrings.

Anne Rixley was, however, in very sober truth, a charming girl; well-grown, with

bright laughing eyes, dark hair that curled naturally, a soft smooth skin, neither too pink nor too pale, and a beautiful set of teeth, which she displayed exactly enough, and no more. In addition to all this she was sweet-tempered, light-hearted, clever and animated, and with a flow of good spirits which not only enlivened her own family, but seemed to carry cheerfulness and enjoyment into every circle she entered.

No wonder, then, that Anne Rixley was declared to be a lovely girl, although her features were neither regular, nor strictly handsome. Helen Beauchamp was not altogether ignorant of the fact that her cousin was less likely to be called beautiful by an artist, than herself; but she was most sincerely persuaded that beyond all comparison she was more attractive: in fact, Helen herself admired her so greatly, that the seeing her dressed to perfection, and shown off in every way to the greatest possible advantage, was one of her favourite occupations, and an unceasing source of pleasure and amusement to her.

Now it so happened that in the immediate

neighbourhood of Beauchamp Park there was but one mansion which could compete in splendour with itself, but this one in some respects decidedly excelled it. This rival mansion was honoured with the aristocratic appellation of Rothewell Castle, and was the autumn and early winter residence of its noble owner, Lord Rothewell. The family of this nobleman consisted of himself, his countess, one daughter and one only son; and as such the young man was of course considered as a person of considerable importance, not only in his family, but in the neighbourhood, where he had been known and loved from a child, and to which he was recently returned after a long absence, which had been spent in wandering through pretty nearly every country in Europe.

Previous to the return of this young man from the continent, a great degree of intimacy had sprung up between Anne Rixley and his sister the Lady Honoria Curtis. The young ladies were very nearly the same age, and had many points of character in common, which very easily, and very naturally led to their becoming great friends.

Another circumstance which assisted to bring about this result was that the two Harrington girls, who were also very near for country neighbours, had neither of them the same joyous tone of character which belonged to Anne Rixley and her noble friend, so that they naturally, and inevitably as it were, formed two pair of Helena and Hermia-like confidants among them—Lady Honoria and Anne forming one pair, Agnes and Helen the other, while the reasonable Jane contentedly submitted to be very happy without belonging to either, while perpetually appealed to for her superior judgment by both.

The only daughter of a noble house can never be quite so important a personage as the only son, nevertheless Lady Honoria Curtis was a very dearly beloved, and a very influential individual, and during the long absence of her brother, Lord Lymp-ton, swayed the councils of Rothewell Castle with as little opposition as he could himself have done.

The consequence of this was that Rothewell Castle was decidedly the gayest mansion in the county. Their dinner parties per-

haps were neither so frequent, nor so *recherché*, as those at Beauchamp Park ; but their *impromptu* dances were at least three to one, and they acted charades, and indulged in *petits jeux*, with a degree of unwearied vivacity which never could have been achieved had any one, save Lady Honoria, been mistress of the ceremonies, or, more properly speaking, of the sports and pastimes of Rothewell Castle.

The return of a gay young heir to such a home as this was naturally the signal for a multitude of fêtes to be both given and received by his family ; and indeed if he had been eaten up by a shark while bathing in the Mediterranean, or buried in an avalanche while crossing Mont Cenis, it is very probable that our sober-minded Helen would never have sent out cards for a fancy ball at Beauchamp Park.

Had the Rixley family not lost the inheritance which Helen had persuaded herself would have descended to them if she had not come in their way to prevent it, she would very probably never have become the plotting young schemer which she has already

shewn herself; and this—far from unjust—imputation was still further confirmed by the circumstances which I have now to relate.

The intimate friendship which existed between Lady Honoria Curtis and Anne Rixley, led to very frequent visits of a week or ten days' duration of Anne at Rothewell Castle, and it was no 'malignant fate' which ordained that one of these visitations was in progress when Lord Lymp-ton returned to the castle from his two years' ramble on the continent.

It had been arranged before this visit took place, that Miss Beauchamp was to call for her cousin on a day fixed among them for her return. This engagement, very punctually kept by Helen, brought her to Rothewell Castle precisely at the moment when this newly-arrived Lord Lymp-ton was in the act of teaching her cousin Anne (and his own sister, of course, into the bargain) some particularly beautiful new polka step.

It would be a useless, as well as perfectly vain attempt, were I to endeavour to make my readers exactly comprehend everything that Helen saw, or fancied she saw, during

this, her own first interview with the handsome young heir of Rothewell Castle. Let it suffice that I assure them she did not think the young Lord Lynton in the least danger of falling in love with herself.

Her drive home with her cousin was not a very talkative one. Anne said but little, and seemed to take an unaccountable degree of pleasure in looking out of the carriage window ; and this of course gave Helen time to think.

And she did think. She thought a little then—and she thought a good deal in the course of the next week or two—and the consequence of all she thought and of all she saw was that she sent out her invitations for the fancy ball, which has been already mentioned so repeatedly.

This plotting and scheming, like several other traits of character which I have faithfully set down concerning Helen, are, I am perfectly well aware, by no means befitting a heroine ; but I cannot help it. The Helen I speak of was exactly such a person as I describe, and my reader must judge her as leniently as he can.

Certain it is that from the time this said ball was decided upon, Helen's thoughts had been fixed on the subject of Anne Rixley's costume with a degree of interest which it could hardly have excited in her, had no object beyond her looking pretty while she wore it been in her head.

I will not take upon me to decide whether a young lady is justified in endeavouring to make her friend look beautiful with all her milliner's might, for the express purpose of turning a young gentleman's head thereby. Justified or not, however, Helen certainly attained her object; for not only did her cousin look more attractively bewitching than she had ever done in her life before, but the young Lord Lymp-ton thought so, quite as much as Helen.

Au reste, the ball was a very brilliant one in all respects, Miss Beauchamp herself was not dressed in costume, and notwithstanding her faultless face and form she was decidedly one of the least remarkable figures that could have been pointed out among the young and the fair who adorned the assembly; neither did the elaborate studies of costume produce

any very satisfactory result for George Harrington; for though nothing could have set off his handsome person to greater advantage than the dark green and black chasseur's dress which he had chosen, Helen Beauchamp was not at all more in love with him at the end of the evening, than she was at the beginning of it.

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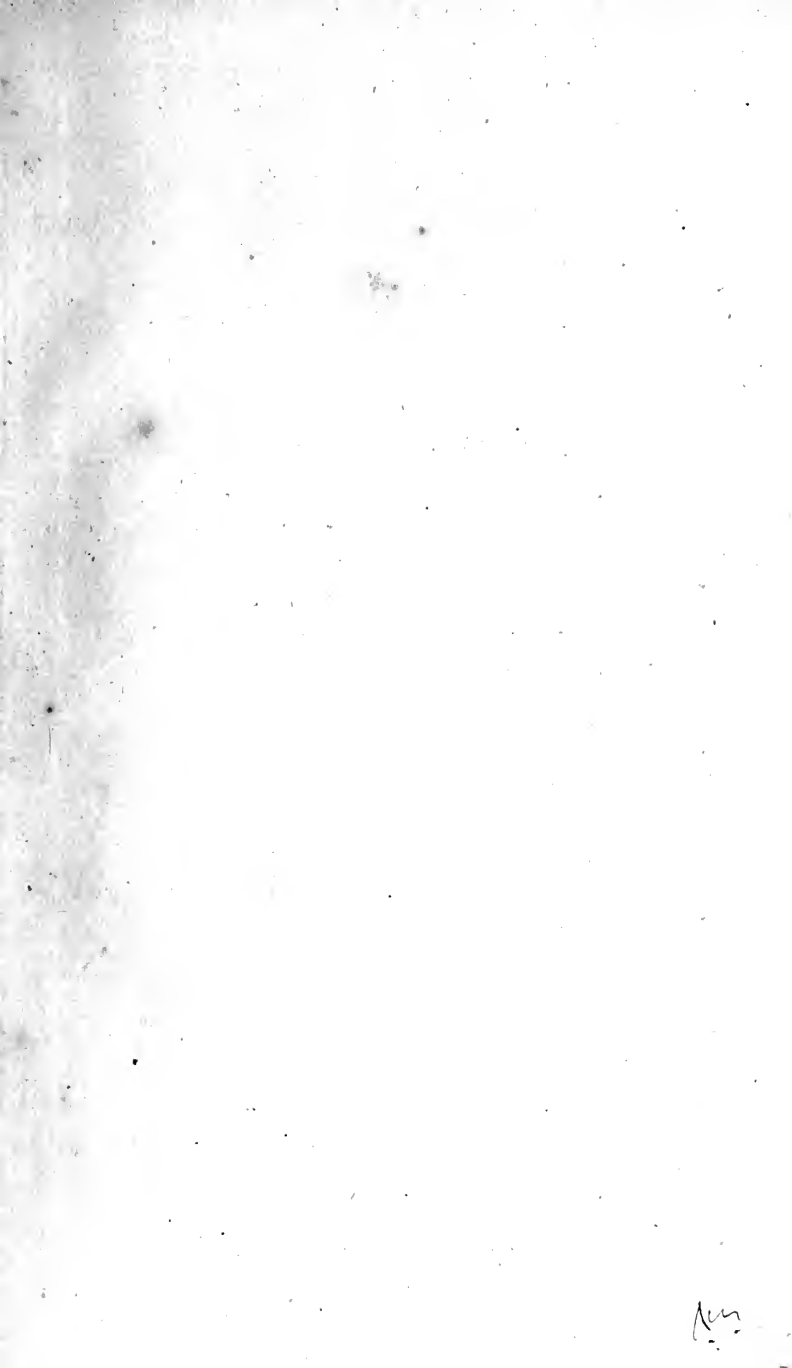
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